

Comments on J.K.Rowling's tale

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September 5, 2021

The purpose of this short text is for me to write down some comments on J.K.Rowling's renowned tale. After reading it and thinking and re-thinking about its content, I think that like other persons of my generation I can say that this tale had an important impact in the way I constructed myself. These comments are meant to explain, to myself, and incidently to others, why it had such an importance.

In order to present these comments, I shall take two perspectives: first an indirect one, where 'indirect' means that I shall consider there what one could learn from the tale in terms of the practice of writing, symbolism and more generally intellectual matter; the second perspective is direct, which means that I shall consider there the content of the tale and its specificity in relation to other texts it is usually compared with.

1 Indirect perspective

"Philosophy begins with wonder" - Plato (Theaetetus 155c-d)

As a matter of fact, several comments have been written on J.K.Rowling's tale after its publication. When these comments do not only provide a straightforward and sometimes shallow criticism, I found that they usually consist in the identification of certain references or influences of intellectual matter coming from various origins (philosophical, spiritual, psychological or mythological), sometimes developping around these analogies, taking the tale as an illustration for these developments. I have the feeling that, although these commentators acknowledge the presence in the tale of an interesting meaning, this interest is immediately translated into an artificial projection into an intellectually and socially structured intellectual context, looking at the content of the tale as a mere shadow of a more original intellectual matter, towards which they direct the reader to. I was reading this tale when I was a child and although I was not a passionate reader, I was irresistibly attracted to it as soon as I began reading the first book. There are several other novels which impress the mind of the reader in a similar way, but as I reflected upon the tale later I found that it contains a certain sense of wonder that I think was really the main factor of attraction for children. Since philosophy begins with wonder, if we are to make some philosophical comment about it, that's where we should begin. Furthermore, if we are to search for a deeper spiritual meaning, we should listen to Matthew's voice:

"Truly I tell you," He said, "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." - **Matthew 18:3**

This means here, looking at the tale as childrens do, and sense the wonder it contains; for me in this text, this means looking at the tale as the child I was.

1.1 Dialogical philosophy

I take this text as an occasion of not only expositing of some philosophical ideas but also of presenting some way of creating philosophical meaning, through an actual dialogue with the text of another person, as it appears to me - in this particular text, with wonder. When \mathcal{I} discuss with someone about his or her ideas, I usually try to understand what the other person tells me; the meaning of these ideas depend on the world of the person, which means that \mathcal{I} should refer to this person's history to disambiguate the words that she uses and find the right way to conceptualise, and understand. This is also how \mathcal{I} can identify myself in the discourse of the other person and make hypotheses on how to continue, complete the train of thoughts that she expresses, using my own ideas. There is co-creation for the reason that \mathcal{I} provide thus an orientation to the other's thoughts which although unexpected for the other, shed some light on the possible directions of the train of thoughts. \mathcal{I} also find this way an 'application' or more precisely a 'condensation' of these ideas, a way to make them more precise and understandable for the other. Such a dialogue reveals in the end the specificity of the thoughts of the two persons involved in it; revealing the specificity of the author's text I think is what understanding it means. Practicing this dialogue with another person through the script is different, for the reason that the person is not physically present in order to react to the representation that I have of her discourse. However the presence of the person is not only manifested physically; to find this presence I have to listen in a certain sense. That means in particular not considering the text as a dead body of thoughts to be dissected but as the living expression of the author's mind. I think that this is what J.K.Rowling's text really is for the reason that the construction of the text itself required an important investment of time and of self, which only an author who finds a certain meaning in writing can provide, a meaning which, as J.Dion expresses it in her *Why I Write*, is searched for itself and thus is the result of a deep reflection.

I found with time that in J.K.Rowling's tale the general wonder that I had when I was a child was reduced more or less to some localised moments in the tale. I have attempted to explain to myself why in these particular moments I perceive a certain beauty - and I think that the way to do it is to be found not in a presupposed universal sense of beauty but in the text itself - in order to recover perhaps the initial sense of beauty that I had.

If you like to phrase it so, philosophy is mystical. For mysticism is direct insight into depths as yet unspoken. But the purpose of philosophy is to rationalize mysticism: not by explaining it away, but by the introduction of novel verbal characterizations, rationally coordinated. -

A.N.Whitehead (Modes of Thoughts)

I think, in a similar way as Whitehead does, that the end of philosophy is, as an intellectual practice, to render visible intellectually something that is felt, intuited, in fact invisible to the intellect, and thus somehow perishable. For that it has to begin with an observable phenomenon - here what it feels when reading the tale. In fact I wish that this text actually makes one understand better the singular beauty present in the tale, for it is not enough to be able to perceive beauty in order to keep it close to oneself. What would come out of this should also make visible, I hope, that interesting thoughts can come out of anywhere - in fact they are the result of the person who thinks, and conceptualises her own experience in order to understand it and not of the particular experience itself. In particular they are not to be found exclusively and necessarily in dusty academic essays. As Heraclitus said:

"For here too the gods are present." - Heraclitus (Fragments, 119)

1.2 About the disenchantment of the world

The massive enthusiasm of children for this tale should actually tell us something about the state of the society we live in, a world that they would reasonably abandon for the magical world that the tale presents. In a thesis titled *Disenchantment and witchcraft: Harry Potter and the legacy of early modern magic*, A.Fredsall connects the dots between this observation and the concept of M.Weber of disenchantment of the world. I like the definition of C.Colliot-Thélène for M.Weber's idea (in the translation 'Le savant et le politique'), that I would retranscript in english as follows:

"The growing intellectualisation and rationalisation do not mean that we collectively have a better understanding of the world we live in. They mean something else: the idea that, if we like to, we can have access to any information about this world; that there is in principle, contrarily to what was believed thus far, no unpredictable and mysterious potency which acts on the world and that everything can be controled with computation. This is the disenchantment of the world."

As a matter of fact, the disenchantment of the world is the collective adoption of the idea that the world is reducible to the knowledge about it that can be intellectually constructed, via mechanical processing of information (computation). The disenchantment of the world is manifested in particular in the privileged position of the scientific method in acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the world, that it gained over other possible means - in particular alchemy and magic, with which it coexisted during the modern period. The thesis of A.Fredsall can be abstracted, in my appreciation of it, to the following: *"By examining the complex ways that Rowling's series and fictional universe engage with the diverse legacies of early modern magic, it becomes clear that Rowling's works are more than children's books telling the tale of a boy wizard; they are instead a series of intricate works that draw from history in order to engage theories of disenchantment and reconsider what could have happened if magic and science had remained entwined."* In this sense the tale would be reducible to a thought experiment or a piece of fictional history. I shall disagree with this thesis for the reason that, while in the tale the current world we live in (shaped by technology), coexists with the magical world, the main purpose of this coexistence does not seem to be of comparing these two worlds systematically and symmetrically, but to exhibit a contrasts with a world in which magic exists and a one in which it is absent, a contrast which demonstrates what the world has lost along with the disenchantment (in fact in the tale there is a clear dissymetry in the way we feel about these two worlds). Contrarily to the thesis also I believe that this leads the way to a re-enchantment of the world, if not at the social scale at least at the individual one. In a sense if we make a comparison between the separation and coexistence in the tale and the world we live in, we might conclude that in fact magic is still there, somewhere, but hidden; and to have access to it we have to change the way we look at it - in particular it seems to me that magic deals with the emotional 'dimension' of the world which, although we unavoidably inhabit it, has been neglected in the contemporary collective discourse. One purpose of the present intellectual inquiry is to attempt understanding how in its construction the tale makes this dimension exists in itself.

While the concept of disenchantment of the world intially denotes a lost of meaning and a decline of values, as a consequence of a rationalisation process dictated by economical dynamics - a process which is itself often irrational - M.Horkheimer and T.Adorno, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, explored more in depth the destructive effects of enlightenment, which consists roughly in the idea that the scientific system is actually shedding light on the world, so that we see it as it is, and not the way we think it is; or in fact the way some persons would like us to see

it (in other words the idea that the obscure in knowledge comes from the construction of some persons and not the world itself). In the words of M.Horkheimer and T.Adorno:

"Enlightenment, however, is the philosophy which equates truth with the scientific system." -
M.Horkheimer, T.Adorno (Dialectic of Enlightenment).

Enlightenment reverses the way to look at the world by focusing on what can be materially used, controlled in order to arrive at a definite material end, a view that was politically relevant in modern times; however it led naturally to the obsession for removing from the world whatever can not be used, whether it is in the attention towards the world, or materially with the destructions we know of the XXth century. A reflection on how the human society arrived at this possibility led C.Levi-Strauss to state the following:

"I think that a society cannot live without a certain number of irrational beliefs. They are protected from criticism and analysis because they are irrational." - **C.Levi-Strauss**

In other words the human society cannot remove certain things from the vision of the world it constructs in a collective discourse without destructing itself. I think that this understanding might actually be enough to prevent some of the visible manifestations of the disenchantment, but not the ones which lie and stay in the multiple individuals views on the world. For that it matters to see that the 'beliefs' are rational when we see the world differently, including its emotional dimension. The tale of J.K.Rowling exhibits in fact an enchanted world, which is not the product of pure imagination for itself, but in which the enchantment results from the rational use of symbolism, towards the emotional dimension of the world, a rational use which is the key to re-enchant one's own world. I believe that this is precisely the meaning of the tale, in which originates the sense of wonder; of course this is not the only text in which one can find this meaning, but it seems that this tale in particular is so rich of this meaning that it may actually incarnate it.

1.3 On the use of symbolism

I would like to define a direction of interpretation of the use of symbolism in the tale, without necessarily exhausting all there is to say about it; in other words I would like to determine a way to look at it which unveils its richness.

1.3.1 Categorical interpretation of symbols

The many comments written on J.K.Rowling's tale identified some analogies - which are sometimes identities - between some of the symbols used in this tale and other ones which appear in other contexts, in particular mythical or mystical texts. Some of these analogies appear to the eye of the specialist, and further to curious readers. My purpose here is not to make an exhaustive list of all these analogies. I would like in fact to point out that if we think about symbols as imperfect ways to represent something which exists out-there, or in-there, one might tend to think that what is actually represented consists in the class of symbols, forgetting about the particular aspects of each of the symbols in the same class and extracting from them invariant characteristics and the structure they form altogether.

I think that this idea that the singular symbols which are present in the tale are imperfect representation of a more fundamental 'concept' led some of the critics to consider the tale as only a collection of *clichés*; in fact this judgement is passed not on the text itself but on an image of the text which is the result of a complex probably unconscious apparatus of cognitive mechanisms of reductions, first of the symbols to the categories they are made to belong to, and then of the

relations between these symbols and ultimately of the nature of the text. More generally a text is constituted of words that we recognise quite rapidly, and to which we associate a particular and somehow personal meaning; in the same way as for symbols, we can distort the meaning intended by the author when we isolate a word or a sentence from its context. In fact when we consider the words themselves independently, a text is a collection of existing things, but the purpose of the text is to put all these words together so that altogether they create a meaning which is not contained in their collection. I think that we tend to apply a categorial reduction to symbols for we are used to approach them in this way (in inheritance of structuralism I suppose, in particular the mythological approach of G.Dumézil).

As a matter of fact this categorial reduction can take different forms according to the *way of thinking* which someone holds when reading, which affects the segments of the symbolism which are categorially associated to some concepts which are present in the mind of the reader at this time. I think that this kind of distortion is particularly visible in the religious critics of the tale, which could be summarised into the idea that the tale is seducing young minds into witchcraft, through the identification with the young heroes of the story, and the desire to belong to a secret and hidden world and feel somehow special. For the sacred text of the Bible, witchcraft seems to refer more to the manipulation of the reality by dissociating and reassociating things in an order which was not assigned by the Lord, in order to acquire some power for oneself on this reality, not caring about what would happen to other human beings. According to this definition, the magic that J.K.Rowling's tale depicts has a different meaning, which works as a contextual metaphor for the installation of a correspondance between magical symbols and structures of our phenomenal experience, and as a metaphor it should be interpreted in relation with the whole of the text. I believe that this distortion of the meaning of the symbolism used is not specific to this particular text and could happen also with sacred texts themselves. Non-understanding is not determined by the text itself, but by the way it is read. Plus, it is amusing (or depressing according to how you may look at things) to think that religious critics are based on a distortion of the representation of magic which is very similar to the way atheists misconceive what believers mean by the word 'God'.

I think in fact that when symbols are embedded in a particular text, what they mean is contained in how they differ from the structure of the category we usually think they belong to; thus in order to understand what is meant in the text, one should focus on these singular aspects.

1.3.2 Jungian interpretation of alchemy

The psychological interpretation - by the author herself - of some of the symbols of the tale is manifest: some commentators have noticed the relation between dementors and depressive state, or the presence of some archetypes, noticed for instance by J.Peterson, who compares the second book of the tale and the segment when Harry delivers Ginny from Tom Riddle with the story of Saint Georges, analysing the various symbols involved - the pheonix, its relation with Dumbledore, the snake, the sword, etc - and how their structure conveys the meaning of a certain psychological schema.

The tale contains various schemata of this type which can be interpreted in psychological terms, which are analogical to alchemical symbolism, such as the philosopher's stone for instance: I have for a long time thought that the philosopher's stone does represent the idea of something real, that of a concept - symbolically the stone represents the graspability of the idea, which one can hold in one's intellectual *hands* - which when kept in mind helps transforming lead into gold - here the lead represent the banality and emptyness of one's experience, while gold represents its valuability - or equivalently generate the elixir of long life or eternal youth - where here life

refers not to the biological life, but the feeling of being alive. Here you could notice that each of the symbols individually can evoke many things but when altogether in some structure, this structure narrows down the interpretation scope and lead to a more precise meaning for each of them: the idea that of a principle for keeping one's relation to the world *alive*. I think that this particular case should enlighten the nature of symbolism in alchemy and other symbolisms, in particular through the interpretation of 'life' and 'death', which are often omnipresent.

I think that it is wrong though to interpret this resemblance as a simple inspiration from the author to do something different from what the symbols are (were) there for: not only the structure of the archetypes are present in the text, conveying their intellectual content, but they are provided some flesh, they are embedded in a living world and as such are touching not only the mind but also the heart, in which when it is held, the meaning has a lot more impact.

Some of the critics have seen categorial analogies with other symbols as a way to 'decode' the construction of the tale, in a sense reducing its emotional aspect to this construction, unveiling the *trick* of the magician; the ego might have a role here, telling back to the author '*I am not fooled by your trick, I see what you are doing here*', or "*this is easy because you recycle structures which already exist*". I believe this reaction is also the effect of the myth that the author is in control of all which happens in the text (see for instance the analogy that Roland Barthes makes between the author and God). In fact if we go beyond the categorial understanding of symbols, we can see that their incarnation into characters is not at all trivial, and that what matters is how they are interpreted and refined, particularised in the text, which triggers the reflection of the reader on what these symbols refer to in their psyche; the symbol itself does not contain what it represents, it is only triggering the wonder in front of some mystery; the reader is the one who makes the phenomenological progression from the symbol itself to the reality it represents.

1.3.3 Symbolic meaning lies in the interrelations of particular symbols

One could see that the whole tale itself works as a mandala, a symbolic object which occurs mainly in trantric Buddhism, and was analysed notably by C.G.Jung in his text *Psychology and Alchemy*, in the sense that it consists in a relatively condensed set of symbols representing structures as well as objects and characters. The difference lies in that in actual mandalas, structures are geometrical, and objects characters are represented statically, while in the tale they are tetradimensional, and in particular evolving in time. Mandalas convey a deep meaning - deep in the sense that it takes time to interpret and thus access to it - which comes from the interrelations between symbols, the whole structure determining the situated meaning of each singular symbol and reciprocally; moreover the possibility to perceive the meaning lies in the compactness of the symbolic object, allowing the eye to make connections between the symbols - while if they are dispersed in a lot larger text or representation, these connections are more difficult to reconstruct cognitively. In practice the meaning that is conveyed is only a direction in the thoughts, leaving room for interpretation and reflexion, and not only a graspable *content* that one can use for another purpose.

In this direction, J.K.Rowling makes an interesting use of the dimension of time, with a subtle play in the progression of the presence of some particular symbols, which appear as simple magical artefacts, revealing then progressively their symbolic capacity, into a *mise en abyme* of their nature's revelation - as vectors of understanding of the psyche. For instance the marauder's map and the invisibility cape are tools for the exploration of the castle, which might represent the extension of the mind, which Harry can explore without being seen by others and equipped from a map which renders him omniscient it this extension (*I have access to everything which is manifested in my mind*). In the fourth book, the portkey transports instantly Harry from the closed space of the castle (the school) to the darker reality of the outside. The pensieve is also

introduced in the fourth book, but it reveals itself as a tool when Harry and Dumbledore try to find back the secret of Tom Riddle, and fight evil in a systematic manner by looking deep inside the memory (of the professor Slughorn). The philosopher's stone itself, which appears as a symbol of eternal life, acts as a first representation of the ultimate goal - in a way the eternal life is a symbol for happiness. Its misleading ambiguity is dissolved at the end of the first book into the hardest but right way of happiness, which is represented in the long sequel of this first book, and the deeper fight against evil. The story of Nicolas Flamel, who dissolved the stone that he synthesised after having lived a long and rich life, is echoed in the last book with the three brothers tale, as a conclusive return to the beginning (with an analogy between the third brother and Nicolas Flamel). In an indirect perspective, this return enriches the symbolism around the stone: the philosopher's stone principle is to create living 'eternity' inside and not outside in the material realm or in the mind of the others (like Tom Riddle and the other two brothers).

I think that this assembling of symbols, by triggering first the wonder (that we have towards simple and amusing magical artefacts), reveals the nature of magic, which is to use phenomena which appear by themselves in the phenomenal field in order to act on and transform one's Experience (by distorting the field of value one attributes to experiences).

1.3.4 Representation of characterial spatiality

I have thought for some time that the designations of 'heaven' and 'hell' can be understood only by changing how we think about space and places in symbolism; by understanding them I mean here not perceiving them as language constructions but as words which refer to something real, and in which part of the reality they belong to. As well as mathematical objects (such as a triangle or manifold), about which we can think about mental processes or classes of objects extracted from or constructed out visual experience, do exist, these mythical places also exist in a similar sense, that is how we think about the relation between a human being and the world, and the space of possibilities of this relation. The designations 'heaven' and 'hell' are pointing at parts of this space which are intrinsically related to the space itself (as is the center of gravity for a gravitational body, cf. D.Dennet *Real patterns*, or the north and south pole of a sphere in an oriented three-dimensional space). Furthermore the attributes of these places represent '*what it feels like to be there*'.

I have been observing that Harry and Tom Riddle actually represent and embody two poles of this characterial space; they are conceptual characters (term defined by G.Deleuze and F.Guattari) in the sense that they are the embodiment of a concept; by the way, one way of thinking about the double nature of the Christ, divine and human, is that the Christ has been human, a historical character embedded in time, but also incarnated so well some concept - the one of love - that, in the facts of the mind, it participated to the nature of this concept (which is eternal, or divine, as a concept). The idea that a fictional character has been compared to the one of Christ actually makes visible this relation between the human and the divine in Christ; I believe that this way of considering religious symbols may convince of the existence of the reality they point at.

In fact I arrived at the conclusion that the various characters of the tale represent aspects of the personality of the author, some sensibility of the author towards some traits of character. I have read somewhere that she identified herself mostly with the character of Hermione; I am actually guessing that she represents the main characteristics of her personality, the most subjective ones, while other ones might represent some archetypes of the psyche (for instance Harry or Tom Riddle) as well as other persons to whom she is sensible - and thus in a sense the traits of character that they have participate to the personality of the author; the other lives in me by the sensibility it opens. In fact all these characters represent some directions in

the highly multidimensional characterial space, and are positioned relatively to the two poles; Harry should be thought as '*the child*', the one of alchemy or christianism for instance, meaning a way of looking at the world with an infinity curiosity, or in other words love for what exists in the world, and whose heart has not been affected by the society of others and the thirst for power. On the other hand Tom Riddle has been completely transformed, distorted into Lord Voldemort. The various characters could be placed on a sort of 'map' of the characterial space, according to their distance to one of the two poles (Dumbledore or Ronald who are affected to some extent by ambition, while nurtured by love of the others, the Malfoy family who is close to the way of thinking which privileges power and domination, but ultimately has not the will to kill for their opinions). One way to look at this kind of map is that it does not only make one see the polar structure of the space, but also makes one perceive the nature of the movement in this space, although it is still subtle and not apparent. Perceiving this nature is in fact allowing the movement, paradoxically because there is no other way than the ones inscribed in the local geometry of the space, and the decision of moving in one direction or the other, which should be clear from the 'global view' over this space.

I think that there are also other aspects of the representation of characterial space present in the tale, some of which I have not noticed. One of them is the magical relation of sorcerers to animals, in a sensibility similar to F.Nietzsche in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, meaning that the animals here represent a particular affectivity of the subject. Sorcerers who transform themselves into animals could be a representation of subjects who are subsumed by their characteristic affectivity (wrath for instance for a dog or a wolf, or the volatility for a rat). The variation and then spatiality come from the degree of control of this affectivity: while the *animagus* has a full control over it, letting oneself being subsumed by it for it is useful in a particular situation, the werewolf for instance is recurrently subsumed by its affectivity without control (just like some persons are unable to control their wrath for instance).

1.4 Magic as a reflective representation

I found in the book *The ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles* [page 30] the following sentence:

"The most salient feature of the J.K. Rowling novels about Harry Potter may well be their engaging portrayal of a world of magic existing distinct from, yet intermingled with our regular, or Muggle, world. But, however important magic might be to the vivid story-telling of the books, it is merely incidental to their philosophy."

I think this is mostly wrong; on the other hand it is interesting to consider the contrast between this representation of magic with the one of religious critics. In the same way as the specific attributes of symbols contain a hint of their actual meaning, magic is not accidental in the tale. Since it appears clear that J.K.Rowling understands the alchemical symbols that she adopts or construct as of psychological nature, magic itself should be thought as the *substance* of the psyche, what it is made of, when this psyche is free from the conventions of the society of others. The magical world is in a sense the society of the subjects whose mind is properly free - free of the way they interact with the world, whether in a rational or 'irrational' way and whose thoughts can thus adopt the form of dreams. This is I think an important factor of attraction to this world, in which many more things are possible than in the one of muggles (our world in fact) in which conventions restrict freedom (in particular of thinking in a certain way). As a matter of fact in the tale the magical world coexists in a rather close way with the the world of muggles, and persons which do not come from a family of sorcerers can acquire sensibility to magic; in a sense this world is relatively accessible, since it is intertwined with our world: it can actually

happen anywhere, since it is a matter of changing the way one looks at the world and not of where one is. In order to see that this limit between the two worlds in the tale materialises a gap in the "*way of thinking*" about the world you could think about the cognitive barrier which exists in the world between different 'sub-worlds', let's say for instance the academic world from the rest of the society, or between two completely different cultures. Although these worlds coexist spatially (in the minds of the ones who belong to them) it is quite difficult to really cross the border, because of the different ways of thinking, mental objects, rules and beliefs. I believe that this way of conceiving what magic is stands closer to what it actually is in the tale because it explains the way we feel towards it (when we read it as a child): a certain freedom. One can think of it then as representing this freedom in another way than we are used to think of representations - of something "out-there" - that is of what we feel when we consider it. I shall thus call this mode of thinking about representation *reflective*, to which one should switch, I believe, to understand what the tale contains, in particular a representation, by contrast, of the absence of freedom in the world we live in.

Furthermore I think that the tale itself contains, in the words of Dumbledore, the way J.K.Rowling thinks about what magic really is:

"Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury, and remedying it." - **A.Dumbledore** [J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows]

In other words, magic, beyond acting as a representation in the tale, lies in language; language which is in fact a part of our reality. I like to think that it is a wink of the author through these words of Dumbledore meaning that all the magic of this represented world does exist in our reality, in the language; this way of thinking about magic provides a key to interpret some of the sorceries involved in the tale, which structurally consist in the association between words and effects, which in the tale are material representations of something which happens *in the mind*; moreover what happens in the mind constitutes our reality, or again in the words of Dumbledore:

"Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" - **A.Dumbledore** [J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows]

I believe it is also a key to understand further the various spiritual practices involving language (such as prayer for instance).

1.5 Symbolic innovation

I believe that the substance of the tale, which made its success, lies in the fact that the author wrote primarily for herself, in the search for meaning, in particular in a fight against evil *in herself*. As such the tale is the result of a literary and symbolic equivalent of *user innovation* (a correspondance that I made previously in another text *Why I Write ?*). For instance I have read somewhere that she created the dementors after some clinical depression; it appears clear when considering the symbolism around these creatures, that they are actually a materialisation of what happens to the mind in depression: each of the dementors, who attack sorcerers in groups, might represent one area of the cognition which attracts the mind and absorb the soul (the life *inside*), from which originates the kind of thoughts that makes me devalue myself. The kiss of the dementor might simply represent advanced stage of the depression: the fall into clinical depression, when it gets physical. The sorcery of the patronus, which relies on a particularly joyful memory, is a way to fight the dementors by one's own thoughts. What happens when uttering the formula is a description of what happens in the mind then: the patronus works as a screen between the self and the dementors, who are furthermore repelled by it.

In fact symbols here work as an answer to a problem, which is of transcendental nature; it does not provide an *algorithm* that one should follow to the letter, but a mental structure. When the 'P' enters in it, it is led intuitively to the actual way back.

There is a continuity of structure and impression of the symbols on the mind from the symbols which are in common with christianism and alchemy for instance (the child, the philosopher's stone) to the one which are more original (the dementors for instance), which should tell us more about the nature of the first ones: how they are constituted, their function (as a tool). In particular these symbols, as well as the archetypal characters, are re-created by the author more than borrowed 'as they were'; in fact they should correspond to structures of the mind which are felt: it is the introspective contact with these structures which is the origin of their personal significance and motivate the creation of symbolism. Created symbols are similar to past ones because they represent the same thing, not because the former ones are copies of the latter. This possibility of re-creating symbols, with a certain degree of innovation, should tell us something about the atemporality of the religious message, beyond the symbols which are used to transmit it.

Dementors are not the only symbols which constitute an answer to problems that the author encountered individually; there are several other ones in the tale. In fact I think that the whole tale itself is the philosopher's stone that J.K.Rowling has constructed for herself. In the tale, it is the way we want to reach the stone which determines the possibility of reaching it (in fact this way of wanting participates to the nature of the stone): in order to find it one should want to find it for itself (or in fact for oneself), and not to use it for power, in relation to others. Wanting it in this way *is* reaching it. This creation around the symbolism of the stone is I think the sign of a deep involvement of the symbolism in the relation of the author's to the world, and thus a deep understanding by the author of what it really means. I believe that the success of the tale comes from that despite the individuality of the reach to these answers, these problems are at the same time practical, usually unanswered by the collective discourse, and universal. This should actually prove that the knowledge of what matters does not have to be transmitted by any form of authority, but can be felt inside.

2 Direct perspective

Some commentators have questioned the coherence of the magical world created by J.K.Rowling (for instance of the possibility even in the world of magic, of teleportation and time travel), in other words if this world could actually exist. Of course this is not the only publication which is questioned this way; in fact this reveals more about the routine of the way of thinking of intellectuals rather than the tale itself, which is coherent enough for the story to make some sense. Since it is meant not to convey knowledge about the world, details about the physics do not really matter; what matters, since in its apparent structure, this world is similar to the inside individual world, is what is felt while reading. I shall then begin with this.

2.1 A world of dreamers

"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one." - J.Lennon (Imagine)

To begin with, it is manifest that the Dursley family represents well the world we live in, for they follow all the conventions of this world, sending the son Dudley to a 'good school', receiving in the second book an 'important person' to sign a contract and following all the conventions a host should follow, as well as the unbearable (even for them) old aunt, because this is what

they should do. They also follow their immediate, material desires, to begin with Dudley, who is the most obviously not happy. Their conventionalism is also what makes them hate magic and dreams, and more generally what is obscure and not understandable for them, because it does not enter in standard categories and ways of thinking, of the norm - in fact this hatred of magic could be paralleled with the despise of standardised 'thinkers' in our world for baroque or sometimes simply different ways of thinking. They hate Harry for what he represents to them - while they adopt him because it is what the conventions tell. The world of magic represents a world of dreamers, a world of persons who think otherwise, in their own way, who hide from the conventional world in order to avoid the judgement of this world. Of course one may think that the sentence of Dumbledore in the first book "*It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live*" does say the contrary, but in here the word "dreams" does not refer to a way of looking at the world but a certain kind of dreams, which are shaped by desire (which gives its name to the mirror of Erised), and in the case of Harry a manifest impossible one, of reliving his parents.

In fact the contact point between this conventional world and the way to Hogwart is actually significant. I think here of trains as ways of thinking, a metaphor which is echoed in the last book, when Harry meets the dead Dumbledore inside himself (they meet in what Harry thinks as the train station Kings Cross). The platform 9 3/4 is a middle way, in between the ones traced by the conventional world. In a sense entering Hogwart school begins with crossing a cognitive barrier, the one of thinking originally, in one's own way despite the apparent obstacle (the wall).

As Harry enters the world of magic, he discovers that, despite all this, the world of magic is not exempt from a form of categorisation; in the school the figure of Dumbledore acts as the one of a judge, arbitrating the houses, which represent sub-societies of sorcerers who are alike and gather inside the school and as the story goes on, outside of it. An important aspect of the story is that Harry has been isolated from this world of sorcerers for his whole life; magic is in him without a form applied by a system and it appears to him as it is and not in a deformed way. He is thus along the story the one who sees this world in depth and in a clear way, what is important and what is not, what is corrupted in this world. This is this view (with his life inside instead of categories) which enables him to make the *right* choices, for instance throwing away the elderberry wand at the end of the last book, instead of using it to gain power. When he meets the sorting hat - which may be a symbolic representation of the way young sorcerers are sorted in the school, that is according to skills and personality aspects in a rather systematic way - he makes a choice against the opinion of the hat, with the risk of being wrong. This kind of courage is natural for him because, although he ultimately belongs to this world, he does not belong to it in his mind.

2.2 An understanding of the manifestations of evil

"Hell is empty and all the devils are here." - W.Shakespeare

As other texts in the past, the tale of J.K.Rowling offers a sort of classification of manifestations of evil. A particularity of this classification is that it does not present a classification of demons, meaning a conceptualisation of the manifestation of evil in the ideal realm but across ideal realm and human reality; in particular evil is symbolically embedded in a world and reality that we understand, and not abstracted from it, and in particular in causal interrelation with this reality. Furthermore there is a progression along the tale in the conceptualisation of evil and the symbolism associated to it: while in the first book, evil takes the form of a ghost of the dark mage, attempting to take on the philosopher's stone, which is revived by the second book and acts on the world through the control of the serpent, which is a classical symbol of the sin (that one can find in the Genesis for instance). In fact I usually think of a sin as a causal chain which begins with a certain free action and ends in a destructive effort on the person of this action,

which I think was originally represented as an *Ouroboros* - that is a serpent which is biting its own tail - in a more faithful way than the serpent by itself (which might sound arbitrary as a symbol nowadays). The serpent in the tale lies deep inside the basement of the castle, like the sin is deeply embedded in our subconscious. In the third book are introduced other creatures which are from acting outside the castle: dementors and boggarts; here I would like to detail the symbolism, not exhaustively but enough to see its singularity. In fact I think it is interesting to see how boggarts and dementors differ. While boggarts do not have a particular form and adapt to the fear of humans and seem to be individual, dementors keep their form and attack in groups. This indicates that dementors are a representation for the diffuse feeling of anxiety and depression (instanciated by many inform thoughts, in a rather uniform way amongst different persons), and that boggarts represent the category of fear itself (which takes different forms for different persons, in an objectified and immediate way). Furthermore boggarts do not act on the mind through the recall of bad memories like dementors. Since they act differently, the sorceries to counter them are different: for the fear it is the sorcery of *ridiculus*. In a sense a sorcery is a direct action of the conscious mind on its mental environment, its psyche. In order to make an interpretation of what it means to execute this sorcery, I think one should think about the wand as the simple focus of attention, the words invoke in the mind the action to take and the mind takes the remainder, acting on the representation which triggers the fear by distorting it, projecting onto it something which makes it less impressing. As anxiety acts differently, it should be processed accordingly. This is the role of the sorcery of *patronus* which I already evoked (I think by the way that the name of patronus could have a similar meaning as the one of saints, which in the mind work as repeller for evil). Without this protection, the fate of the one who is subjected to the dementor:

"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 anymore, no memory, no ... anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just exist. As an empty shell."

Anxiety and depression can act this way; leaving one as an empty shell - of course to a certain degree - because of the obsession for a minimal set of things which take up all the room in the mind, thus emptied from all which matters: freedom of thoughts, joys, etc. The soul is ultimately what disappears when in this state [thus it exists and this should tell what it is], that is, the life of the inside, while the life of the outside {the mechanical functions of the body} is still there.

Beyond these creatures which are representations of abstract actions of negative thoughts, evil can be embodied into some human characters such as Tom Riddle, in a similar way as other characters such as the Christ embodied the concept of love (Voldemort represents what a human can become when letting the evil complete his control over oneself). He exists primarily as a ghost and through the mind of the others (present in the mind, as for the professor Quirrell) or as an interpersonal influence, on the Malfoy family for instance who is revealed in the end to obey Riddle because of fear more than reason, although some others like Bellatrix joined him for the pleasure of torture and destruction more than power. Ultimately the fear of the name *Voldemort* tells that fear insinuates itself in human through the language, which is another way actual language is intertwined with magic.

In the end of the tale evil reveals itself to have some deep structure; I like to think about the tale as some progression towards an understanding of evil, and the horcruxes represent the most advanced understanding here; I also think that horcruxes, although they might have been abducted from old myths, are here a form of symbolic innovation, and again the meaning of the symbols lies in the details. Thinking about structural aspects of the horcruxes, their number for instance, one may associate them with the seven deadly sins. I do not claim to have an exact understanding of this symbolism but I think that the details tell something else. The

constitution of each horcrux comes with a murder: if I think about characters as parts or aspects of one personality then the murder might correspond to the suppression or repression of one of these aspects. This makes me think about F.Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* in which Raskolnikov, after the murder of the pawnbroker, enters progressively into an obsession about this event; in other words his soul is enclosed in it, reduced to it, or at least it is divided between the one who he really is and the one who is obsessed with the murder. Out of psychological pain he ends up surrendering himself. This is actually clear in the end of the tale that Tom Riddle became Lord Voldemort out of the hatred of his origin and of himself - the one that he was before he entered the world of magic - and I think that the horcruxes describe how this hatred manifested itself. Each of them represents a certain weakness, a sensibility to the world by which one may die - symbolically again, death representing a psychological destruction of oneself. Tom Riddle is immortal in this sense but is not living completely, as he repressed the emotional dimension of his relation to the world. Most of the horcruxes that Tom Riddle has created out of himself are valuable objects (the locket or the tiara for instance); there might be a more refined interpretation but I would tend to think of them as idols, in a sense human values { such as for instance, intelligence } which I follow in order to make myself valuable { towards myself, thinking how more intelligent I am than others }, and not *divine* values, meaning values which can keep myself alive - or in other words bringing peace to my soul. I think that the fact that the last horcrux (before the one he did not intend to create) is a snake is reminiscent to the idea, that I found in the philosophy of S.Kierkegaard, that sin can be forgiven, only if it is not willed as such - which is what Tom Riddle did when enclosing a part of himself in the snake, as representation of sin. Furthermore the fact that horcruxes as objects are small and spread around in the world might corresponds to how embedded and invisible these seeds of evil become with time. Finally the living reaction of the horcruxes when Harry, Ronald, Hermione and before them Dumbledore tried to destroy them should confirm the interpretation of their nature: since they are the objects in which Tom Riddle has hidden his sensibility to the world, destroying them is equivalent to reveal his non-superiority over the others and thus such an attempt triggers the immediate need for his soul to attest his superiority through the diminution of the other who come close {I have often seen such a reaction in myself, I am guessing this is rather common, although not often discussed accurately}.

Ending this section I would say that one might not adhere completely with the interpretations that I made, but it is pretty clear, for me, that along with writing, J.K.Rowling came with an understanding of what evil is and how it is manifested in the interior world of a person with a depth that would be difficult to find elsewhere with a similar accuracy.

2.3 Subtleties of evil

Some religious critics have pointed out that the tale introduces some confusion between good and evil; I think however that this confusion disappears once one understands a bit more the structure of the tale.

2.3.1 The limit between light and dark is non-categorical

In fact the dimension of time is important with respect to this matter. The tale begins with a clear, apparent, distinction between good and evil, instanciated in the way we perceive the houses for example: to put it simply, *Gryffindor* is good and *Slytherin* is evil; the tendency to evil of Slytherin is explicit in the words of Hagrid "*There's not a witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't from Slytherin*" or in the exposition of the philosophy of the founder of this house by the professor McGonagall, when explaining what the Chamber of secrets is. The proximity

of the reader to Harry, Ronald and Hermione as well as their own proximity with the character who incarnates wisdom and moral authority - Dumbledore - makes undeniably the reader take the side of *Gryffindor* against *Slytherin*. In other words we tend to think that good and evil correspond exactly to a commonly accepted *categorisation* of the students who enter the school, which consists in fact in a construction. One manifestation of this separation is the fear that Harry has in the first book of belonging to *Slytherin* house, and later of his similarities with Lord Voldemort.

However the end of the first book introduces confusion in this vision, in particular with the surprise that Quirrell (because of his apparent weakness, which is probably the reason why he is embracing evil) is helping Voldemort in his quest of stealing the philosopher's stone instead of the professor Snape, and then more explicitly in the point of view of Voldemort on good and evil:

"There is no good and evil, there is only power and those too weak to seek it."

I don't think that the reader, even if a child, would take these words to the letter, precisely because they are pronounced by evil incarnate. However they are as announcing a deeper blur in the categories of good and evil as we perceive them, which is descriptive of the evolution of the mind than prescriptive: for instance when we progressively discover that Sirius Black (whose name would make us naturally think that he is not on the side of the good) was wrongly accused to be a criminal, dismissing the trust in the administration to tell what is right or wrong, especially with Dolores Umbridge ruling the school in a way which is manifestly (from the point of view of the reader) not adapted to the situation. Furthermore along the tale Ronald, despite the fact that he is surrounded by the love of his family, manifests recurrently some thirst for recognition and power, for instance when he contemplates his image in the mirror of Erised (himself as a prefect and holding the quidditch cup), when he is envious of Harry for participating to the Triwizard Tournament. In fact it is probably the downside effect of being part of a large family which makes him ambitious this way, as his individuality is denied. On the other end Drago Malfoy, while he is formed by his social environment, is ultimately only a prisoner of this influence, which is shown by the decisions that he makes when they really matter, for instance not revealing the identity of Harry when he could have done it, or not killing him when Crabbe and Goyle were pressuring him to do so.

This blur on the categories of good and evil is not meant by the author to say, as Voldemort does, that they do not exist, but that they do not correspond to what we tend to think they are, and are always more subtle. I believe that when Tom Riddle was a student he was blurred in the same way; he probably concluded that good and evil do not exist at all, and when they do not exist the only way to make sense of the world is by the mechanics of power, a sense towards which we tend by the action of ego. In fact in the first book Voldemort tries to teach Harry his vision of the world by proving him that only power makes sense (for instance with enough of it he could resurrect his parents) in order to have him on his side. On occasion in the tale dark mages try to prove their vision of the world by the power that they have or the gap in skill which separates them from others: for instance when Harry tries to use the sorcery *doloris* on Bellatrix Lestrange, she teaches him that in order to acquire more power and control over the other one has really to mean it, and that he lacks this meaning (from the point of view of Bellatrix, a weakness); since only power makes sense and that the path he chose - the one of love - prevents him to acquire more power, that means he chose the wrong path. This aspect of the tale, I believe, captures the destructive effects and motivation of what has been called *enlightment*; furthermore the enlightenment is also manifested under the form of the control exerted by the ministry of magic on the school in the fifth book, acting in particular by removing

what is magical in magic: its most mysterious parts (divination) as well as what is actually useful (defence against the dark arts) in the fear that it could be used against the ministry.

As a matter of fact, the tale does not say that good and evil do not exist, but that they can not be formulated in terms of categories (of persons), as in manicheism (or at least what we understand of it), but are present in all human; this is made explicit by the author in the words of Sirius Black, when Harry is doubting about whether he is a good person or not:

*"We've all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on...
that's who we really are."*

In fact I do not completely agree with Sirius Black, and I believe that the author would also disagree: this is proved in particular with the character of Severus Snape, whose love, which he does not want anyone to be aware of (as a weakness), made him care about the life of the child; this part of him, while forming what he actually is (explaining his choices) is not what is visible to others, it is not even chosen (if he could act on it Severus would definitely suppress it, and least at the first encounter with it). It is actually not necessary to discuss whether Snape is actually more good than evil to see that the exact distinction between evil and good is not understood by Sirius Black, or even Albus Dumbledore; I believe that they can not be captured by an intellectual concept: they have to be intuited, felt.

This does not mean that the distinction is not ultimately clear. With respect to this, what happens after the death of Voldemort is consequential - especially because it can be considered as a conclusion, what the story actually tells. The tale does not end with a classical '*they lived happily ever after*' but with two scenes illustrating Harry's acquired certainty about light and darkness. There is first the ultimate temptation of power (with the elderberry wand) to which Harry renounces by breaking and throwing the wand away. The second scene echoes his fear of belonging to Slytherin in the first book: by acknowledging the character of Severus Snape and his courage (of doing what has to be done despite mistrust and rejection from both sides), to the point that his son bears his name, he tells that courage can take forms that do not correspond to what we think courage is, and that is why Gryffindor does not define what it is. Ultimately it does not really matter which house one belongs to; in other words, real virtues do not correspond exactly to what symbols or words we use to designate them.

2.3.2 The categorial chaoticity of the determination to light or darkness

The characters of Harry and Tom are opposed in who they are, that is by the choices they made and make; one of the important aspects of the tale, however, is that they are still closely related, symbolically (the scar) but also by the psychical connection they have. Along the tale Harry acquires a deeper understanding of this connection, which may represent the possibility for him to turn to evil, a possibility that is probable, provided the skills that he has, and that other sorcerers around him are fearful of. This potentiality is always latent (after his '*resurrection*'), and disappears when he surrenders to Voldemort, sacrificing himself for his friends; that is, in a sense, loving the others protects oneself from the action of evil. This sacrifice is similar to the one of the Christ and this similarity has been pointed out by commentators; however it should be noticed that J.K.Rowling innovated symbolically here again by incorporating in the symbolism itself the christian statement of the necessity of Christ's sacrifice: in the tale the sacrifice is the consequence of intelligence, the one of Dumbledore (who may represent God the father), meaning that it has been thought for its consequences on the world.

Although the prophecy affected the image that he has of himself in the middle of the story, he learns in the end that he is a subtle construction of intelligence, through the action of the world that he inhabits, in a similar way as Tom Riddle is. Furthermore this determination towards

light and darkness is rather subtle, meaning that it separates persons who are originally alike: both of them are orphans and were feared by the persons who surrounded them (because of their natural ability for magic). The difference between them lies of course in the love of the mother, but also in the way the world of magic received them: while sorcerers expected Harry and took care of him by leaving him to his family after he was rescued (which is invisible to him but still has some effects, just as love), Tom has been abandoned by his family and lived in an orphanage where no one really cared about him, making in particular his solitude in the world even more manifest. Even if Harry lived with people who did not appreciate him at all, he has not been alone. Furthermore to a certain extent proximity binds the symbolic violence: Tom Jedusor is perceived as mad and dangerous as a child (while Harry is only reprehended for he had used magic, on his cousin in particular). When Dumbledore comes to collect him to the world of magic - who is presented to him as a doctor, coming to cure him of his magical deviance - what he proves him is not wonder but the power of magic, which Tom perceives as a possibility for a revenge on the world. Moreover the world of magic is not expecting him and he has to continuously prove himself, and this drives him to search for even more power, on the others and on himself - in particular removing his past identity, and embracing completely the world of magic.

In a sense the original similarity between the two characters disappeared and the difference is determined completely by the presence - or not - of love (even if invisible).

Away from the beginning, the development of Tom's way of thinking about the world was actually deepened by his relations with other sorcerers, in particular the professor Slughorn. The professor embodies a tendency that I guess professors have, to make a *collection* out of their most brilliant students, not only for the network but also for he identifies himself with these students, as the origin of what they build in the world [they are *his*]. In fact at this moment of the tale, professors appear less as figures of authority as it was the case when the students were younger than persons themselves struggling with their own mechanisms of thoughts, an image displayed already symbolically with the professor Remus Lupin in the third book. I believe that the fact that Tom had a special relationship with the professor Slughorn is not accidental: in fact this relationship could be one which definitively transformed Tom, for the professor could see in him what Tom wanted himself to be; the problem is that what the professor sees is not necessarily what is ultimately good for the student, because it supports him in his pathological ambition. The interaction between Tom and the professor around the horcruxes makes me think that horcruxes could also represent some intellectual *objects* in which one could put one's soul into, distorting oneself in the search for an extreme technical and academical refinement. Thinking about the whole world of magic as a metaphor for the mind, the objectality, the fact that they are hidden, and their resistance, by might tell us that they become, with time, mechanisms of thoughts that are hard to recognize - it is through the consistent knowledge of oneself that one can do so - and to dissolve, especially for they are held by persons who have power. At the end of the sixth book, I think about the army of ghouls that rush on Dumbledore and Harry after they grasped the horcrux as the representation of how the society of others reacts when one tries to unbury the kind of 'evident', although arbitrary, truths that rule the society and root its structure, because they make the value of the ones who form the structure of this society.

2.4 Around the castle

The fact that the school itself is a castle is unusual for a lot of students; however this in itself might simply come from the inspiration of existing schools, such as George Heriot's school, which is commonly accepted as the main inspiration for Hogwarts. On the other hand the castle bears a rich (sometimes potentially indirect) symbolism. In fact I cannot help but thinking here

about *The Castle*, written by F.Kafka: there the main character, K., enters the scene holding the thought that he is expected in the castle, as he had been hired as a land surveyor {my interpretation is that this is an abstraction for the feeling that children have when projected in the world}, and finds out progressively that it is an illusion {that is what most of us also do}, resigning himself - without having to think through - to an average life around the castle. The way I think about *The Castle* is as a statement of disenchantment of the world. J.K.Rowling's tale differs from it in the sense that Harry is expected in the world of magic in which he enters right at the beginning, by entering the castle.

I believe that how the castle is inside as a school does matter a lot in the impression that children have of the tale, that means not in an intellectual analysis disappointed by the absence of relatively immediately visible intellectual matter - of a complex intellectual structure beyond symbols themselves - but in how it feels to read the text. In fact although students evolve most of the time in a relatively secured space inside the castle, it contains several mysterious parts that students often do not get to explore, for else they are forbidden or hidden; and this contrasts with most schools in the modern world, which are designed entirely for functional purpose, reduced to it; and the reduction of the place one evolves in naturally reduces the freedom of the mind, which I think that children feel without necessarily reflect upon it {about this, G.Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, described the poetry of a space which the mind inhabits by imagination, that is all what appears to this mind which is not graspable but only manifested with words}. Mystery is what renders the castle alive, and leaves in the mind the impression of a vast space of unknown, that is freedom - a freedom that I do not think is reducible to the simple cognitive isolation from reality that fiction brings. Furthermore the main characters experience this freedom even more as they do it against the rules, with the help of the invisibility cape (from the second book) and then the marauder's map (from the third book), which provide children of the feeling of control of the exploration of the castle, while in school of our world there is no possible way for students to ultimately escape the surveillance of the professors. Furthermore the main characters are acknowledged for what they did (in particular willing to prevent Voldemort to acquire the philosopher's stone in the first book) despite the fact that they broke the rules. This does not mean that they are encouraged to do so, because they are reprehended (for instance after going out of the school at night), but that they had the courage to continue despite this, for it was right to do so and not for gaining points and ultimately the cup (which is what Slytherin students do). In fact this is also the realisation in this fictional world that there a way to achieve things without following the rules to the letter.

I also like to think about the castle as the materialisation of the boundaries of the mind - another way to put it would be to say that it is a form of an alchemical vase, which contains the alchemical process of 'self-construction', or *individuation* as C.G.Jung would call it. In this sense the marauder's map and the invisibility cape are tools in the exploration of the mind, the cape for the suppression of the look of the others and the map as a 'geographic' representation of one's inside. This comparison is of course an *a posteriori* conceptualisation, which is not immediately present in the experience of reading, however I think one of the main reasons why the text has fascinated children is that what it contains echoes something which exists in the mind although not perceived, because it is shut down in the real world. As I mentioned above, I like to think about the various characters as the embodiment of aspects of one personality: in the same direction, I like to think about the hidden places in the castle (in particular the chamber of secrets or the room of requirement) as cognitive *places*, with an analogy for instance between the underground and the unconscious in which inhabits the snake (the sin) - which means that evil lies in the mind as a potentiality. After the first two books, evil is displaced progressively from the inside to the outside, although still in the surroundings of the castle: in the third book with the dementors and the discovery that the image of evil that one has of some

persons is in fact a lie - it relates evil and its ambiguity to the representation. With the ultimate competition of the fourth book - a competition which is individual and not collective - Harry is transported instantly far away from the castle [the portkey], in the wide world in which lives the incarnated archetypical evil. The evil is then invading the school, under the form of the reform of the school (fifth book), removing the substance of education, leading to the death of Dumbledore [one may see here an analogy here with history, the rationalisation of education and intellectual activity during the XIXth century, and the realization God's death]. This forces the main characters to leave the school, first with an independant learning (the army of Dumbledore) and then with the search for the roots of evil in the end of the tale. In the end the ultimate fight against evil happens around the school. I will not develop this here but it would be interesting to analyze more deeply these dynamics between the inside and the outside in the identification of the presence of evil.

I also found interesting about the seventh book that most of it happens outside of the school (except for the end) and that it involves not much magic but a lot of hopeless research, and most of the magic used consists in memories from the school, for instance the objects bequeathed by Dumbledore whose purpose is discovered with time and effort by the main characters in the research of the horcruxes and their destruction; this is the part of the tale which is the closest to the situation in our world in relation with magic.

2.5 The unperceived

In a sense the discourse of magic is about the unseen, what one usually neglects in one's own experience. This can be because of not taking enough time to observe what a certain experience (which can be simply a visual experience, and not necessarily one involving subtle emotional variations) contains, in itself or in what it triggers inside (a certain subtle feeling for instance). This is correlated in different ways to the tendency to extract from the experience what can be used for a particular purpose that one holds in mind when having it: as soon as one gets what is needed, one leaves; as well the purpose is reduced by the reduction of the perception. Overall this results in a contraction of the personal world in which one feels enclosed, to the point that the tools which could be used to counter this phenomenon become invisible. The purpose of the language of magic - as well as alchemy - is to maintain the component of wonder in the experience, of unexpected and surprise - that which leaves the world open - or to lead back to it.

I believe that the character of Luna Lovegood is a sort of marker of this phenomenon: even in the world of magic, she appears as a strange person in the eyes of the other students, in particular because she sees many things that the others do not, to the point that when she tries to explain certain things about what she sees, what she says does not make sense to the others [for instance the thestrals]. I think that she appears this way only for the other characters and not for the author herself: for instance she is able to find back Harry who was hidden below his invisibility cape when in the train going to Hogwarts by detecting wrackspurts around him. In fact she seems to be a person who likes to get off the beaten tracks, free of the norms in terms of thoughts (in an almost mystical way), is aware of it and the way the others perceive her but accepts it completely. I have to admit that for this reason I like to identify myself with this character more than others. It is interesting to notice that she appears in the tale after that Harry experienced the death of another person, which acts as a distortion of his relation with the world and his consciousness [when such a distortion appears, one is able to perceive the world differently and in particular perceiving things that were invisible thus far, such as the thestrals], as well as the perception of some event (the return of the dark mage) which gets him closer to the character of Luna - in a sense getting closer to her in his relation to the world makes him closer to her 'in facts'. In fact like Luna, Harry becomes in the fifth book a sort of

Cassandra, announcing some event which he can not convince others to believe. This accentuates the conversion of 'madness' into insight that I have seen in the character of Luna and the theme of magic as an opening to an unknown, unperceived reality. The fact that she accepts herself as she is and perceived allows her to tell her thoughts without holding them back, and use them and what she reads in between the lines in order to distort intentionally the perception of the others (because she has a good understanding of it): for instance making Harry see that the way he feels (isolated) is the consequence of Voldemort's action and that it is possible that many persons - to begin with, her and her father - believe him or can be convinced even if he cannot perceive it in the moment, or when she transforms the image of Harry for the other students who come to the meeting for the creation of the army of Dumbledore, more by curiosity than a will to participate. In particular she makes him appear as an expert in the defense against dark arts by telling about his mastering of the patronus sorcery. In a sense, in the character of Luna Lovegood, magic coincides with the action on one's own consciousness and the one of the others, which should tell something about the nature of magic in general.

2.6 An unspoken deconstruction

The practice of magic - not the apparant one but the one which is refered to symbolically - is turning the individual to the wide world of the possible, without a direct influence of the political power, or the administration - which tend to control the behavior of the individuals and their way of thinking, via a certain conceptual structure integrated during school years. In fact magic is an introspective and *introtractive* practice, which means that the source and the end of this practice is found inside oneself and depends entirely on oneself. With respect to this the character of Umbridge in the fifth book incarnates the absurdity of the administration and of faithfulness to the administraton: in particular the reform of education operated in Hogwarts is the result of an irrational fear (the one of the minister of magic, Fudge) and the unquestionned faithfulness to the decisions of the minister. The result is an absurd reduction of the magical education, through the transformation of the class of defense against dark arts into an empty and useless theoretical work. For me this is a symbol of the invasion of administration and collective (sometimes irrational) control over the individuals which, in the denial of the obscure, in other words what lies outside of the rational part of the mind, prevents them from developping tools to counter the threat of evil in themselves. In fact I think that the character of Umbridge represents well the Slytherin house, and the hatred of the variety of the forms of magic [in particular magical creatures, that she has in common with Draco Malfoy]. Here I believe that magic should be seen as the large category of the possible relations with one's inside world, which includes in particular its most rational part [the science, the mathematics] and the hatred of Slytherin to the variety of magical forms as the hatred of the other forms of relation to one's mind than the ones which can be translated into the language of mathematics. Incidentally, some commentators have questionned the presence of Slytherin in Hogwarts (*is ambition a virtue ?*). The way I think about it is that the school actually represents a rough categorization of the ways of thinking of the young sorcerers; the categories (the houses) are a representation of the same ways in the society; in other words the school is a microcosm which has a similar structure as the larger society. In fact I think that the school stays the center of the tale even in the end, because it is the place where the form of the society is determined.

The characters are not well understood by the categories which are present explicitly in the tale (the houses for instance) but also by other ones which are more implicitly displayed, such as the opposition between professors (more generally adults) and students. At the beginning professors appear as figures of authority, their role is to discipline and punish; progressively they appear in their personality, beliefs, affections, in their complexity as persons. For instance

MacGonagall, symbol of a firm and just authority, reveals in the end the child in her {who is excited by the perspective of using a sorcery which she has willed to use for a long time}, a transformation which gives her some courage (to confront Voldemort). In the same way, the professor Snape reveals the lost love which is burning him. As I expressed above, all the characters could be seen as what G.Deleuze and F.Guattari called conceptual characters, as they represent a possibility of being, a position in the whole spectrum of being. It has been noticed by commentators that the attributes of the characters are not correlated to the feminity or masculinity in the same way as they are in the way we think about these in our world (for instance Hermione who is more rational than emotional, or supposedly). One can find another example in Severus Snape, who I think shares important aspects of how we usually picture of witches that we have usually in mind (dark, long hair, concocts potions). In general I believe that the feminity or masculinity of the characters is a symbolic encoding for the way the author feels about the corresponding part of herself, as well as the age of these characters, which should be thought in the same way as other aspects of their personality (such as authority, desire for recognition, etc). In a sense in the whole tale the author does not care about the categorial way we think about persons, not because she searches an active deconstruction of the categories but because she, I believe, is looking at a deeper and more fundamental reality which does not depend on them. In fact when Dumbledore rewarded Harry, Ronald, Hermione and Neville at the end of the first book, I had the sentiment that the way he did it, after that Slytherin has been announced to win the cup, is somehow mocking the system of attribution of points (which is probably older than him), using it to credit the courage of the main characters. I would tend to see a parallel here between this and the rejection of legalism in religion.

2.7 Courage, virtue of the heart

I think that an error that several commentators are subjected to is to think about the virtue that the Gryffindor house represent - the one of courage - in the same way which characterizes the other ones; by that I mean that they are virtues of the intellect. If one thinks about it this way, courage is merely 'overcoming obstacles' and in a sense would be quite close to the virtue represented by Slytherin house - that is the one of ambition. In fact this courage is an aptitude and is not a matter of choices (which proves again how subtle is the difference between evil and good). I think that the substance of courage in the tale comes from the heart, and not the intellect. It is particularly significant in that it replaces the ambiguous and commonplace equivalent principles that one often encounters elsewhere (*'listen to your heart'*) with the following one:

*Decide and do according to what **feels** right, and not according to intellectual, heartly neutral, principles. Even if difficult.*

When Dumbledore, who has himself struggled with ambition and care (for his family), says that what matters are not aptitudes but choices, I think he means fundamentally choices about what we should hold in mind when making decisions. When he overtly favors courage over other virtues (for instance at the end of the first book), he means to counterweight the tendency that sorcerers (or humans) have to follow, in their decisions, the virtues of the intellect more than what they feel like right - a factor which is fundamental to magic and what is lost in the disenchantment of the world. When Harry is meeting Dumbledore (regularly in the tale), he is fundamentally listening to a friend who, with all the wisdom he acquired, is simply telling him not to listen to him but to listen to himself, inside - thus placing himself at the center of his own world. I think that these moments are the most important, because they form a contact point in between this fictional world and our world which is not material or spatial, but deeper, about the way we live.

I believe that the characters of the Gryffindor house were for the author a way to explore the diverse manifestations of courage, which in a sense instantiate, or realize, the corresponding abstract virtue. I don't mean to write an exhaustive list of these manifestations but only to illustrate what I am saying with few of these characters. First I think that Hermione is quite important in this respect. As she does not feel like she belongs to this world originally, she is approaching magic with hard work to integrate herself, but also with virtues that she inherits from our world: logics, and literary knowledge. In fact she lacks a deeper understanding of magic and its most singular forms, that one can see when she rejects premonition, one by the way she thinks about the character of Luna - while Harry, maybe somewhat doubtful, proves a more open mind. The moment in the whole tale that I felt the most about her character, I found it there (in the first book):

"Hermione's lip trembled and she suddenly dashed at Harry and threw her arms around him. 'Hermione!' 'Harry - you're a great wizard, you know.' 'I'm not as good as you,' said Harry, very embarrassed, as she let go of him. 'Me!' said Hermione. 'Books! And cleverness! There are more important things - friendship and bravery and - oh Harry - be careful!'"

The courage of Hermione lies not in her cleverness but in her recognition of what really matters (it does because it makes one happier), which goes beyond what is collectively recognised as 'great'; she understands her limits and what she has, yet, to learn. Since J.K.Rowling tends to identify herself with Hermione, I believe that this sentence represents a lesson that she learnt herself; however I do not think that the whole tale could be reduced to a series of lessons like this one (as if she is transmitting a certain form of knowledge or wisdom, where knowledge here should be thought as what lies in the tension between a problem and a solution) but it consists in a research of formulation, through the characters themselves and their relations. One can see another form of courage in Hagrid, who manifests love for creatures which are not understood and that everyone else fears [for instance Norbert the dragon, Aragog, the spider]. In fact one can see another ambiguity between good and evil in the comparison between Hagrid and Tom Riddle in the second book, where the difference still appears clear when taking a closer look: Hagrid does not use these creatures to do harm other sorcerers, he loves them for what they are, beyond appearances. Another example of courage is given by Fred and George Weasley: when the absurdity of the exercise of power in Hogwarts reaches heights (in the fifth book) they recognise that what they are is not defined by the school, and just display outside what they are inside - anarchy, humour, joy - and makes sense for them, even if it leads to a consequent scholar failure (because it does not ultimately matter).

Sometimes more subtle forms of courage are displayed. In fact for some time until recently, while I deeply wanted to achieve something - in fact, writing on certain things, or for myself - I was somehow searching for someone - of authority - who would validate my project and allow me in some sense to execute it. I felt something similar when in the third book, Harry is watching himself in the past, with Sirius, attacked by the dementors. As he has seen someone executing the sorcery of patronus to save them, that he really wanted to be his father [I think that here the father is the representation of the more abstract 'figure of moral authority'], he is waiting for him to come. At some point he had to realize that this person was him. I think this is what I felt like when I had myself to realize that in order to do something that I am deeply meant to do, I am the one who has to do it. Of course there is also the courage of Neville, who stands against his friends: you may take from the tale that friendship equals good, but this is too shallow to represent what the tale really means; the courage of Neville consists in doing what feels right to do, even if it implies the difficulty of standing against his friends (and thus not only because this is common sense).

2.8 The individual and the creation

On courage, J.K.Rowling goes deeper than other sometimes shallow modern myths; but I believe that the real depth of her tale lies in the character of Severus Snape. He is the most human character of the tale because he has in him this living struggle between good and evil - in a sense similar to what we read about the past life of Dumbledore in the end. One part of him is determined to good : for instance when he requests Dumbledore to hide Lily's family from the dark mage, he does not care only about her. Another part of him is determined by ambition: while he has a manifest talent for potions, he is still eager to become professor of defense against dark arts (which I suppose is considered as more prestigious). I think that this is this frustrated ambition which determines his isolation from the world. The character of Snape also proves another form of courage, that is to sacrifice himself (in the form of not really belonging to any side in the fight of good against evil) for what is right (helping Dumbledore in his long term project of eliminating Voldemort). Furthermore Snape, as the half-blood prince, incarnates the possibility of powerful individual creation, beyond the precise and well established formula that the students learn in the school [as well, the class that Harry provides to other students proves it possible to progress and learn by oneself when the school does not provide the kind of practice or knowledge that is needed]; this creation is possible in magic, and in the real world (through the language and its use that we can constantly re-create). He is in a sense a *mise en abîme* of the symbolic user innovation I mentioned in one of the comments above.

To conclude, I would say that what J.K.Rowling has done in her work is not only a symbolic re-creation, but the idea of the possibility for others of this re-creation; and in a sense the hope for an autonomous symbolisation and conceptualisation of one's own world, including every aspect of one's existence; a conceptualisation which should rely not only on authority (spiritually, the sacred texts and their interpretation, and scholarly, the educational system) but also largely on introspection (for which sacred texts and the educational system can be good tools, but only tools), and thus, one oneself.