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"*Harry Potter* Revisited: Normativity and LGBT Experiences"

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Abstract: Between 1997 and 2007, British author J. K. Rowling published seven books that caused a revolution in children's literature and immortalized their protagonist, Harry Potter, as one of the main icons of this century's popular culture. The *Harry Potter* series have sold millions of copies, have been translated to eighty languages and taken to the big screen by Directors such as Alfonso Cuarón or David Yates. This project aims to revisit this famous saga and to analyze it from a critical perspective, focusing on the queer experiences that can be drawn from an in-depth reading of the books. The plot of the novels is based on a subversion of socially established normativity, and therefore the projection of queer experiences on the characters is not difficult to imagine. The character of Dumbledore will be closely scrutinized on his own, for he is the only confirmed homosexual character in the *Potter* universe; however, the way his sexuality is addressed —or, rather, *not* addressed— actually ends up consolidating heteronormativity. Along those lines, it will be explored how stereotypes in children's literature bear the potential to harm readers' upbringing and self-image. Finally, it will be commented how LGBT readers of these books may project their own experiences through fanfiction and online forums, in an attempt to both counterbalance the shortage of representation in the canonical works and to explore their sense of self.

Keywords: Harry Potter, LGBT, children's literature, queer reading, stereotypes, normativity.

Helena LÓPEZ

***Harry Potter* Revisited: Normativity and LTBT Experiences**

0. The Boy Who Lived: Contextualizing *Harry Potter*

Joanne Kathleen Rowling first came up with the idea of *Harry Potter* in 1990 in a delayed train Manchester-London. For five years after that, she conceived the plot for the seven books of the series, and in 1997 *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was published by Bloomsbury Children's Books —today Bloomsbury Publishing. Since the very first book, the saga enjoyed enormous popularity and received excellent reviews from the critics. According to the official Bloomsbury web page,[1] over 500 million copies of the books have been sold all over the world and translated to 80 languages, including Latin and Ancient Greek. In 1999 Warner Bros. Pictures bought the rights of the saga and adapted it to an eight-part series which was as successful as the books. They are, beyond doubt, among the biggest box-office earners in the history of cinema: by May 2019, they had obtained more than 9 million dollars only in box-office earnings.

Due to this huge success, the *Harry Potter* franchise has been expanded in numerous ways, including a theme park in Orlando, Florida, and several spin-off books such as *Quidditch Through the Ages, Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them,* and *Tales of Beedle the Bard.* In fact, Rowling has written the script for a film adaptation of *Fantastic Beasts*, which was released in Autumn 2016. She also wrote the script for the sequel, released in 2018, and at least three more films are confirmed to come in the next years. Moreover, a play based on a short story written by Rowling herself, titled *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child,* premiered in 2016 at the Palace Theatre in London.

Only observing these numbers, alongside with the many awards Rowling has received in the past twenty years, it becomes evident that the *Harry Potter* franchise is one of the most popular and successful in the history of children's literature. In almost every bookshop, toy store and gift shop *Harry Potter* paraphernalia can be found: replicas of wands, mugs, tote bags, t-shirts, figures of the characters… Among the generation of children that grew up reading the books or watching the films, there are few who have not taken quizzes online to find out their Hogwarts house or the type of wand they would own if they were wizards and witches.

Even though nowadays the *Potter* books keep selling extremely well, during their publication they produced almost a fever among children of all ages, but especially among those born in the late 1990s and early 2000s, who grew up by Harry's side. Moreover, the releases of both the books and the films coincide with the boom of the Internet. Suddenly, children and teenagers all over the world had access to a massive space that allowed them to discuss their favorite topics with other fans. Of course, one of them was *Harry Potter: MuggleNet*, one of the most famous *Harry Potter* sites —without taking into account *Pottermore*, nowadays called *Wizarding*

[1] The data about amount of sold copies and languages the Potter books are translated to are directly retrieved from the official Harry Potter web page, powered by Bloomsbury Publishing. See Bibliography for more information.

World, founded by Rowling herself—, started in 1999. Young readers (and, probably, not so young) could enter all kinds of forums to talk about their favorite book series with people other than their friends, neighbors or siblings; in short, people far from their daily life. And, why not? They were able as well to write their own stories based on the *Harry Potter* universe —the phenomenon known as fanfiction. For instance, *Archive of Our Own*, one of the most popular websites dedicated to fanfiction in English, to the date of this paper has over 232,400 works under the tag of "Harry Potter,"[2] all of them submitted by fans of all ages all over the world. It is unavoidable, in a work of such magnitude and popularity as *Harry Potter*, which as well treats delicate themes as death, bullying or prejudices, that readers relate to the characters and project their own experiences in Harry or in any other secondary character whose background appeals to them. As it will be discussed further on, one of the key plots of the series is that of normativity, which, as it is socially conceived, is no longer something necessarily good or desirable. One of the main traits of Harry —and, by extension, of the entire magical world— is that he is nowhere near to what is considered a normal, standard kid. Not only for being a wizard, but with such a different personality compared to the Dursleys,[3] his adoptive family and main representatives of the non-magical world. While he is the hero, the Dursleys are antagonists; while they take pride on how normal they are, Harry embraces his non-normativity, even though he does not understand the source of it at first.

This disruption with normativity invites to perform queer readings, given the great number of parallelisms between the queer experience and the *Potter* world, which will be explored in the following section. However, at the same time, it seems that this dichotomy between the normal and the abnormal only confronts the magical and the non-magical world. Ultimately, LGBT themes are objects of censorship and the ideological status quo ends up reinforced. Rowling tries to challenge normativity by including diversity in the *Potter* series; taking just a superficial look to her work it could appear she succeeded, but in a deeper analysis it can be seen that it happens precisely the opposite.

It is indeed unsatisfying to see that nowhere in a series of books that celebrates diversity and non-normativity, there are no hints that point toward the existence of LGBT people, whether in the magical or non-magical world. The only homosexual character of the series, Albus Dumbledore, did not come out until Rowling announced it in a reading.[4] Nowhere in the books is he confirmed to be gay, or at least there are no explicit clues that point in that direction. Precisely, the aim of this project is to examine the connection between normativity, queerness and censorship within the text, and further on it will be discussed how stereotypes and heteronormativity

[2] This fact is collected directly from the official Archive of Our Own website, after introducing "Harry Potter" in the search engine, as of April 2020.

[3] Since there is a great number of names, terms and references to the Potter books, I will be including a Glossary as an appendix to facilitate the reading of this project.

[4] This reading took place in Carnegie Hall, New York, in October 2007. For an account of it, see the article extracted from The Guardian mentioned in the Bibliography.

harms children, LGBT or not.

1. Queering *Harry Potter*

As it is mentioned in the introduction, one of the premises in the *Potter* books is that being normal is not viewed as a virtue anymore. Since the very first page of *The Philosopher's Stone*, normativity is treated as something that must not necessarily be observed. This is established since the very first page: Harry's adoptive family, the Dursleys, "were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense" (*PS* 5).[5] By starting the book with such a sentence, Rowling is setting up two opposite worlds, that of the "normal" Muggles and that of the "abnormal" wizards. The Dursleys are what it is considered a normal, traditional family: Aunt Vernon sells drills, Aunt Petunia is a housewife and cousin Dudley is a regular, although spoiled, kid. They live in a nice house in Privet Drive and have "everything they wanted" (*PS* 5), but they also have a secret: Lily, Aunt Petunia's sister and Harry's mother, is a witch. In fact, it is such a secret that

> They didn't think they could bear it if anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs. Potter was Mrs. Dursley's sister, but they hadn't met for several years; in fact, Mrs. Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister, because her sister and her good- for-nothing husband were as unDursleyish as it was possible to be. (*PS* 5)

The worst fear of the Dursleys is that someone discovers their secret and, therefore, they no longer be considered normal and unable to fit in the non-magical society. When they take Harry in, after the death of his parents, they treat him with disdain: he must sleep in a cupboard under the stairs, there are no pictures of him in the house and he is forced to be almost a servant to Dudley during his birthday (*PS* 17–18). The reason for the behavior of the Dursleys toward their nephew is, in short, that he is a wizard, therefore not normal, therefore a menace to their own normality. Moreover, Harry is aware that he is not normal: for instance, during a visit to the zoo for his cousin's birthday, he causes the protective glass of a terrarium to vanish and the

[5] For a matter of agility, I will be using acronyms for the titles of the books when quoting a fragment. They are as it follows:
– PS: Philosopher's Stone
– CS: Chamber of Secrets
– PA: Prisoner of Azkaban
– GF: Goblet of Fire
– OP: Order of the Phoenix
– H-BP: Half-Blood Prince
– DH: Deathly Hallows.
These titles correspond to the British version, which is the one I am working with.

snake inside it to come out and terrorize Dudley (*PS* 24). This incident, although heavily reprimanded by the Dursleys, is treated in the book as something funny and anecdotal. Again, Harry *knows* he is not normal, but in the books that is not a problem; rather the opposite. As Pugh sums up, "By rejecting normality as a virtue, Rowling endorses non-normativity as a key trait to her heroic protagonist" (84).

The world of the wizards and witches is completely different to that of non-magical people —Muggles, as they call them. It is not only a lifestyle, but essentially a different reality; Ehnenn puts it as it follows:

> [T]he *Harry Potter* novels provide the reader with, indeed, advocate a subculture that critiques the values and practices of the "normal" world. To begin, the wizarding underworld is complete, and has an understanding of itself as such (236).

They have their own slang, like the word "Muggles" indicated before; they dress differently to Muggle standards, with robes and cloaks and high-heeled shoes (*PS* 9); they even have their own safe spaces, private and secret to the Muggles, as Hogwarts School or Diagon Alley. In short, as Hagrid, Hogwarts' groundskeeper, says: "… our world, I mean. Your world. My world. Yer parents' world." (*PS* 41).

In the universe of *Harry Potter*, and especially in Hogwarts —the main space in which action takes place—, there is apparently no sexism: girls and boys take the same classes, the Quidditch teams are mixed, and the feminine characters, such as Hermione, are well respected and have prominent roles in the development of the story. However, a closer look is necessary: in the case of Hermione, her intelligence and opinions are submitted to the objectives of the hero; her knowledge and wisdom, ultimately, are only tools to help Harry in his victory against Voldemort. As Suman Gupta notes, whenever Hermione wants to explore other topics on her own, such as house-elf slavery, her arguments are dismissed, for they are not important to Harry's objectives (qtd. in Pugh and Wallace 271). A similar case is that of Professor McGonagall; although she is a wise, powerful witch, in *Philosopher's Stone* her opinion is quickly dismissed in favor of Dumbledore's: "Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed, and then said, 'Yes —yes, you're right, of course' " (*PS* 12). In addition, she is the Deputy Headmistress, which could point out to the existence of women in positions of power in the magical world; but all of them— including Dolores Umbridge, fifth book's main antagonist— are, on the one hand, subjugated to male bosses (Minister Cornelius Fudge being the boss of Umbridge) and, on the other hand, merely exceptions in a long succession of male leaders (Pugh and Wallace 269).

Regarding racial issues, several minor characters are insinuated to be people of color. That is the case of Lee Jordan, who wears dreadlocks (*PS* 12), and Angelina Johnson, who has dark skin (*GF* 163); Parvati and Padma Patil are likely to be Indian, and Cho Chang could be read as Asian because of her name. However, every major character is white and these few characters of color do not counteract the whiteness of

the books (Pugh and Wallace 277). It is striking too that people of color's names are simple and common, whilst almost every white character has extravagant names or related to their occupation or key traits, especially those born of wizards: Pomona Sprout, Minerva McGonagall, Hermione Granger or Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.

As for the presence of LGBT characters, in the entire series there is only one that can be accounted for: Dumbledore, Hogwarts' Headmaster. By not openly including them —not gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transgender people; no one that merely questions their sexuality or assigned gender—, as well as not including relevant people of color and women with their own agenda, Rowling fails to represent accurately the twenty-first century (Pugh and Wallace 264). Indeed, the scarcity of LGBT characters and the negative outcome that appears after performing a queer reading of the texts have the potential to harm readers of all ages, despite their sexual orientation, especially in a series that celebrates non-normativity.

As introduced previously, the disruption with normality established in the *Potter* books invites to queer readings. Bronski argues that the *Potter* books are subversive and "profoundly queer in the broader sense of the word," meaning that they offer "a more generally deviant, nonconformist, renegade identity" (paragraph 8). The dichotomy between a traditional, socially conventional world and a secret, separate world that celebrates non-normativity easily produces a space for LGBT readers of all ages to project their own experience, especially for a young audience who might not have many role models that divert from heteronormativity (Ehnenn 234). Throughout the seven books there are many situations in both the wizarding world and the Muggle world that can be extrapolated to the queer experience.

To begin with, the way the Dursleys talk about magic in their house could be compared to hate speech performed in a homophobic household (Ehnenn 235). Although the existence of Lily Potter is kept a secret most of the time, when she is actually mentioned is in the terms of "freak" and "abnormal" (*PS* 42). Aunt Vernon declares that "something strange" in Harry is "nothing a good beating wouldn't have cured" (*PS* 46). They despise Harry simply because they despise magic in any form (*GF* 29). They even refuse to say the words "magic" or "wizards" in their house, instead referring to them as "her crowd" (*PS* 7),[6] as it is a common mechanism among hate groups. Moreover, the event of "coming out" as a wizard offers many similarities with the experience of coming out as part of the LGBT community. Harry always knew he was different in a way, but it was not until Hagrid explained to him the existence of the wizarding world that he started to understand what was different about him and to feel he belonged in a community. When Harry arrives to Hogwarts, he discovers that "lots of people had come from Muggle families and, like him, hadn't had any idea that they were witches and wizards" (*PS* 98), which is a common coming-out narrative as well (Ehnenn 237). As Pugh and Wallace argue, "Harry's discovery of the wizarding

[6] Here, it is Lily Potter who is been referred to, but the sentence can be easily applied to any wizard or witch.

world ... leads him to question Muggle normativity in ways that are strikingly similar to the ways in which queer coming-out stories question heteronormativity" (7). The Dursleys despise magic —motivated, primarily, by the fear that someone realizes they are related to someone that does not adjust to socially-established normality. Whereas Harry accepts his magical condition naturally, his family forbids him to practice magic in their household (*CS* 8) and even tp refer to magic in any way: as Uncle Vernon yells, "'I WARNED YOU! I WILL NOT TOLERATE MENTION OF YOUR ABNORMALITY UNDER THIS ROOF!'" (*CS* 7). This is quite similar to, for example, having to remain silent about being part of the LGBT community in a potentially discriminatory environment —what is known as "passing." Furthermore, as it was mentioned before, wizards and witches have several safe spaces, like Diagon Alley, in which they can be themselves; these spaces can be compared to gay bars and similar. While they have to put on regular pants and shirts when going in the Muggle world, they can safely wear robes and cloaks in their own spaces.

A darker take in the LGBT-related experiences in *Harry Potter*, leaving aside the comparison between the magic world and the Muggle world, is the treatment of werewolves in the wizarding world. In general, speculative fiction (that is, science fiction, fantasy and similar genres) provides such a wide space for LGBT characters; indeed, for their inherently condition of outsiders, LGBT authors and readers have been traditionally identified with monsters and mutants in fiction. That would be the case of *Carmilla*, the 1872 novella written by Sheridan Le Fanu, in which a lesbian relationship between the protagonist and the vampire Carmilla is displayed. According to Creed, "her lesbianism arises from the nature of the vampiric act itself. Sucking blood from a victim's neck places the vampire and the victim in an intimate relationship" (225). In the case of the *Potter* novels, among the various supernatural creatures that populate the wizarding world, lycanthropes yield comparable experiences to that of LGBT community.

As well as LGBT people, werewolves are marginalized within the magical society. Pugh and Wallace note that "the connections between textual lycanthropy and metatextual queerness are striking" (267). Remus Lupin, who appears in the third book, talks about his struggle finding paid jobs because he is a werewolf (*PA* 228). He keeps his condition in secret in order not to alarm students and parents; Snape, one of Hogwarts' professors, tries to force him to "come out," so to speak, by ordering his students to write an essay about werewolves, in order to expel him from his teaching position (*PA* 113). Indeed, Remus has to give up his position at Hogwarts at the end of the book, mostly because he is worried about what parents will say when they realize a werewolf is so close to the children (*PA* 270). This series of events could be extrapolated as well to LGBT experiences: in both cases, because of prejudices, an environment of distrust and fear is created, hindering the chances to find paid jobs (Pugh and Wallace 267). The necessity to hide one's sexual orientation in the work environment out of fear of being fired is a common LGBT experience, especially when through history homosexual and transgender people have been often compared to predators or pedophiles.

Another example of this correlation between werewolves and LGBT people occurs to one of Ron's brothers, Bill Weasley, who results bitten after a confrontation with another werewolf in *Half-Blood Prince*. He is to be married soon, but his mother, Molly, expresses her concern about the bride breaking the engagement (*H-BP* 622). Here, as Pugh and Wallace explain, "Werewolves serve as a figure for queerness in that families must readjust their relationships and expectations of one another when a member becomes a werewolf" (267). That is, the coming out of one member of the family is taken as a turning point in the relations among the said family and their romantic partner; because of how the heteronormative system works, Molly Weasley could have had the same reaction if Bill had come out as bisexual or a transgender man. In the case of her son being a werewolf, Molly would prefer that Bill kept his identity a secret, since she considers that Fleur might break the engagement for that reason.

Within the story, both Lupin and Bill are "good" lycanthropes. They are positive characters, whereby the gravity of their werewolf condition is mitigated. Their families (in the case of Bill) and friends (as for Lupin) accept them and overcome the prejudices against werewolves. In contrast, for example, in the *Carmilla* novella mentioned before, the primary LGBT character —Carmilla— is decidedly rendered decidedly a monster, in both her moral attitude (seducing young girls in several occasions) and her appearance, when her vampirism is revealed and she transforms into a monster (50). Nonetheless, if lycanthropes are to be taken as queer figures in the *Potter* books, the comparison turns disturbing when realizing they can also serve as figures of pederasty (Pugh and Wallace 267). Remus himself confirms the peril he supposes to Hogwarts' students: "[Parents] will not want a werewolf teaching their children, Harry. And after last night, I see their point. I could have bitten any of you" (*PA* 271). He acknowledges his own inability to control his desires, but since he is a good werewolf, he endeavors to do it and sacrifices himself. In contrast, Fenrir Greyback, one of Voldemort's adepts and also a lycanthrope, enjoys preying on children: "… [H]e licked his lips slowly, obscenely. 'But you know how much I like kids, Dumbledore'" (*H-BP* 273).

Finally, it has to be considered as well how lycanthropy is transmitted: through blood, in a very similar way HIV is transmitted. Given the historical (and erroneous) association of LGBT people to be bearers of AIDS, this correlation cannot be dismissed. In her comment on Freud's analogy of erogenetic and illness, Butler explains that this analysis produces a homophobic discourse according to which male homosexuality is viewed as intrinsically pathological. While organic diseases, she adds, have had always a correlation with erogenous body parts, HIV have been always been constructed as a pathology of homosexuality itself (64). Pugh and Wallace explain the relation between werewolves and LGBT people as it follows: "Given the diseased nature of lycanthropes in the texts, the metaphor between werewolves and gay men marks all queers as quite literally sick" (268). Moreover, both Lupin and Fenrir Greyback die in *Deathly Hallows*, which may suggest that death is a preferable outcome than to be a werewolf, or queer, if the metaphor between lycanthropes and LGBT people are to be observed.

Regardless of how many parallelisms between the *Harry Potter* series and queer experiences can be found in the books, the reality is that they are no more than critical readings. As Pugh puts it, "These dynamics … remain subtextual or otherwise peripheral to Harry's narrative trajectory and do not measurably undermine the series' powerful investment in heteronormativity" (84). *Harry Potter* tells the story of a straight boy; it is easy to overlook these parallelisms unless they are specifically analysed. Apparently, in the whole Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry —in the entire wizarding world, in fact— there are no lesbians, gays, bisexuals or transgender people. There are no students who question their sexuality or gender; no one has two mothers or two fathers, not even a gay cousin, nor there are celebrities with unclear sexuality. In the end, Harry ends up married to Ron's sister, Ginny, and having three kids (*DH* 454–456); Ron marries Hermione and have several children too (*DH* 455); even Draco Malfoy, one of the main antagonists to Harry throughout the series, appears married and with offspring as well (*DH* 456). Every possible trace of interest toward the same gender is negated quickly. In the fourth book, the way Ron behaves around a Quidditch player he admires can be read as romantic interest:

> Ron hovered behind the bookshelves for a while, watching Krum, debating in whispers with Harry whether he should ask for an autograph —but then Ron realized that six or seven girls were lurking in the next row of books, debating exactly the same thing, and he lost his enthusiasm for the idea. (*GF* 233)

In her essay *Bodies That Matter*, Butler explains that being castrated is related to feminine experiences and that "castration is the figure for punishment" (96). The feminine is associated with inferiority, weakness, less that the masculine; a man that would be closer to that femininity (a gay man, in short) would be considered castrated. The terror of occupying that position would motivate homosexuality to be rejected and considered abject (Butler 96), and instead an heterosexual positioning would be preferred as acceptable and desirable. In the excerpt cited above, Ron is so embarrassed about behaving like the girls —about being "castrated"— that he quits his hovering immediately. He keeps admiring the player throughout the book in a much more discreet way. And, nevertheless, this potential romantic interest is rapidly dismissed when, in *Half- Blood Prince*, he enters a relationship with another female student.

As for Harry, he looks up to this Quidditch player, but he could never be romantically or sexually attracted to him. For he is the ultimate hero of the books, he ends up defeating him in the Tri-Wizard Tournament in *Goblet of Fire*. Because of the way heroism works in the *Potter* novels, it is, in fact, impossible for Harry to develop a romantic relationship with a male partner. His masculinity must remain undisputed (Pugh and Wallace 272); he could not be put in a position that suggests his castration. Therefore, if he were to have a boyfriend, Harry would be equaled to him, albeit he is required to be superior to any other character in the series. In the series, being part of

the LGBT community is something that would be fine in the case of a character mentioned once or twice, or who is conveniently dead and no longer has the potential to influence Harry; but it is never something desirable for the main characters.

2. Outing Dumbledore

In October 2007, J. K. Rowling offered a reading in Carnegie Hall, a concert venue in New York. During the question-and-answer session after it, one of the assistants asked if Dumbledore, Hogwarts' Headmaster, had ever fallen in love. "My truthful answer to you… I always thought of Dumbledore as gay," Rowling replied. And she continued:

> Yeah, that's how I always saw Dumbledore. In fact, recently I was in a script read-through for the sixth film, and they had Dumbledore saying a line to Harry early in the script saying, 'I knew a girl once, whose hair...' I had to write a little note in the margin and slide it along to the scriptwriter, Dumbledore's gay!'

Despite this statement, the reality is that there is no evidence of Dumbledore being homosexual in the books. Nowhere throughout the seven books is to be found a husband, an ex-boyfriend, nor even a hint that makes readers think that he has ever shown romantic or sexual attraction toward a man. In the sixth book it is revealed that he maintained a close relationship with another wizard his age called Grindelwald, who will later become a dark mage comparable to Voldemort. According to Rowling's words in the Carnegie Hall reading, that should have given the readers (at least, the more mature ones) a clue about him being gay: "Dumbledore fell in love with Grindelwald, and that added to his horror when Grindelwald showed himself to be what he was." However, in the books the relationship between the two boys appears to be primarily friendly (*DH* 115), not much different to how the relationship between Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, for example, is portrayed,[7] in which case it could be easily inferred that they, too, were homosexuals. Given the prominent role of Dumbledore in the novels —he is not only Harry's primary mentor, but he also acts as moral touchstone for the characters—, the deliberate occlusion of his sexuality becomes critical.

As it was asserted before, the disruption of normality in the *Potter* books is one of the key plots of the series. The rejection of innocence as a necessary virtue for children, as Pugh argues (86), plays an important role in the development of the novels as well. The treatment of topics rather rare in children's literature occur often

[7] In Prisoner of Azkaban it is described how they were best friends; they even learnt how to transform into animals in order to help Lupin with his lycanthropy (PA 226–228).

through the books: death, alcoholism,[8] horrid creatures,[9] scatology…[10] These and other taboo issues are frequent in the *Potter* novels and discussed freely, without any censorship. Indeed, Rowling talks with more freedom about them than about homosexuality. By being deliberately obscure about Dumbledore's sexuality, outing him in a reading instead of in the actual texts, homosexuality is rendered as something censurable and off limits. Moreover, Dumbledore himself is a firm advocate of telling the truth to the children. When he addresses the students after Cedric Diggory's death and Voldemort's resurgence in *Goblet of Fire*, he says:

> 'I think that you have the right, therefore, to know exactly how it came about.' Harry raised his head and stared at Dumbledore.
>
> 'Cedric Diggory was murdered by Lord Voldemort. … The Ministry of Magic,' Dumbledore continued, 'does not wish me to tell you this. It is possible that some of your parents will be horrified that I have done so — either because they will not believe that Lord Voldemort has returned, or because they think I should not tell you so, young as you are. It is my belief, however, that the truth is generally preferable to lies.' (445–446)

Given Dumbledore's refusal to conceal the truth, it is quite odd that he never shares with Harry such an important part of his personality, not even during Harry's adolescence or when he starts dating girls in *Order of the Phoenix*. Rather, shielding Harry —and, by extension, all readers— from his sexuality, he reinforces heteronormativity as the desirable outcome for the main hero. "As Harry's mentor, he voices the texts' numerous themes, guiding the protagonist and young readers to partake of his wisdom," Pugh explains (96). Dumbledore guides primarily Harry while he matures, but his input affects the entire wizarding world, in which he is considered one of the most powerful and influential warlocks (*CS* 217). According to Knutsen, Dumbledore aims to teach "individual bravery, decency, dependability, diligence, honesty, kindness, and solidarity" (qtd. in Pugh 92). Essentially, he represents the good, someone to whom children should look up; however, "they should do so while remaining innocent of his sexual orientation" (Pugh 95). Therefore, occluding his sexuality is to say that him being gay is something reprehensible that children should not learn whatsoever.

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[8] Often, the underage characters of the books appear drinking some magical beverages called butterbeer and firewhisky. Although it is unclear if they contain alcohol or not, given their names and their effects (Harry compares kissing a girl with the "blissful oblivion" caused by firewhisky (DH 72), that is, indeed, a possibility.

[9] A distinctive example of these horrid creatures would be dementors, specter-like figures who have the ability to feed on human happiness, and monstrous in form: "Where there should have been eyes, there was only thin, gray scabbed skin, stretched blankly over empty sockets" (PA 246).

[10] It is not uncommon that J. K. Rowling resorts to jokes that contain a scatological component. For example, a magical product is advertised like this: "Why Are You Worrying about You-Know-Who? You Should Be Worrying about U-No-Poo—The Constipation Sensation That's Gripping the Nation!" (H-BP 75).

When discussing the repudiation and abjection of homosexuality, Butler asserts that homosexuality is "cast as the figure of the symbolic's 'failure' to constitute its sexed subjects fully or finally, but also and always a subordinate rebellion with no power to rearticulate the terms of the governing law" (111). Albeit his numerous positive qualities and magical power, Dumbledore, who is homosexual and consequently a failure, necessarily has to die in the climax of *Half-Blood Prince* (376). His death responds to a specific reason: he needs to disappear in order to legitimate Harry as the one and inimitable hero. If Dumbledore were to establish a romantic or sexual relationship with Grindelwald, homosexuality must have to be treated directly, since learning about Grindelwald proves to be necessary for Harry in order to defeat Voldemort. On the contrary, Dumbledore disappears altogether from the plot, facilitating Harry's maturation to both heroism and heterosexuality (Pugh 100). As Dumbledore is Harry's primary source of wisdom and knowledge, and because he has been purposely oblique about his sexuality, he has fundamentally guided Harry toward heteronormativity.

3. *Harry Potter* and Queer Media

It has been discussed at length in the previous sections that, despite its continuous challenging to normativity, *Harry Potter* reinforces the sociological status quo and heteronormativity. The books "illustrate ways in which heteronormativity guides readers into culturally normative sex roles" (Pugh and Wallace 263). The stereotypes in feminine characters and the negative readings that can be applied to their only openly gay character have the potential to harm children, LGBT or not. Norton argues that

> Children are harmed by the male and female stereotypes developed in traditional literature. First, if the stereotypes are uncorrected, they contribute to the construction and validation of retrograde, politically unequal meanings for males and females. (421–422)

Taking this into account, it is not unreasonable to think that readers may turn to alternative ways to balance out the underrepresentation of LGBT characters. It seems plausible that LGBT readers of any age would build their own stories around Harry, especially given the space for queer readings that has been mentioned before. As Ehnenn explains,

> If, along with theorists such as Alexander Doty and David Halperin, we think of 'queer' as a verb, a reception practice, an anti-heteronormative way of reading and seeing the world, then Rowling's texts offer ample opportunity for such queering. (229)

That would be the case of fanfiction —to write alternative stories around an already

existing fictional character, that may or may not follow the canon established in the original source. On that subject, Berger explains that fanfiction forums offer "a space where writers can explore and articulate their own sexualities and desires … in dialogue with a favourite show or character" (178). In the introduction to this dissertation it was mentioned that in *Archive of Our Own* there are over 232,400 results under the tag of "Harry Potter." If those results are filtered by adding the tags M/M and F/F (male/male and female/female relationships, respectively), more than 5,000 fanfics are available.

Even if *Harry Potter* does not treat queer themes directly, it has already been explained how several experiences detailed in the books can resonate to LGBT readers. Since the books fail to effectively fulfill those experiences with actual, positive LGBT characters —and whose sexuality is addressed directly, not confirmed in a reading—, it is natural that readers would turn to online forums to find other people with similar experiences.[11] Hanmer asserts that "new media fan sites construct discursive arenas, where audiences not only investigate the text but also senses of self may be revealed and explored" (147).

Since their publishing, the *Potter* books established themselves as part of popular culture, especially after the release of the film adaptations. Media culture "contribute to how we conform to the dominant systems of norms and influence what we desire and what we think, feel, and believe" (Nylund 12–14). And, nowadays, at least in Western culture, *Harry Potter* is part of the mainstream. It has contributed to shape the identity, beliefs and sense of gender or sexuality of thousands of children around the world. For that reason, it becomes essential to analyze how these books help perpetuate heteronormativity and how stereotypes are displayed. Even if readers have the chance to resort to online communities —like fanfiction forums— and explore their own selves therefrom, it is critical to revisit key works of popular culture and study how they bear the potential to harm children, and what can be done to prevent that from happening.

3. Conclusion

Between 1997 and 2007, J. K. Rowling wrote a series of seven books that promptly traveled around the world and entered the life of thousands of children. In them, normativity is questioned, and values like honesty, kindness, bravery and solidarity are acclaimed.

The aim of this dissertation was to perform a critical reading that explored how queer issues intersection with a series that offer such a wide space to project a non-conformist identity. Unfortunately, for the reasons explained above, the books fail to effectively challenge sociological status quo, and, in fact, contain stereotypes that

[11] Since the aim of this project is to explore LGBT experiences in Harry Potter, in this section the focus is put on LGBT-themed fanfiction. Needless to say that other fanfics about the series also explore other underrepresented communities; for example, fanfiction that include more racial diversity.

revolve around gender roles and sexuality and may harm young readers. Rowling's treatment of normativity is contradictory: on the one hand, she attempts to break normativity, but simultaneously occludes the sexuality of the only character that defies heteronormativity —Dumbledore—, so that the sociological status quo remains stable and upheld.

On the other hand, it has been addressed how readers have the possibility to supply, in a way, the lack of LGBT characters by turning to fanfiction and online communities that allow them to explore their own sexualities and to examine other possibilities only outlined in the books. Nevertheless, popular culture shapes our upbringing to a great extent. For that reason, in a series of books that enjoy such popularity, it becomes critical to study how these stereotypes and misrepresentation can affect the growth and development of LGBT readers.

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