

# Harry Potter as a Gothic Novel

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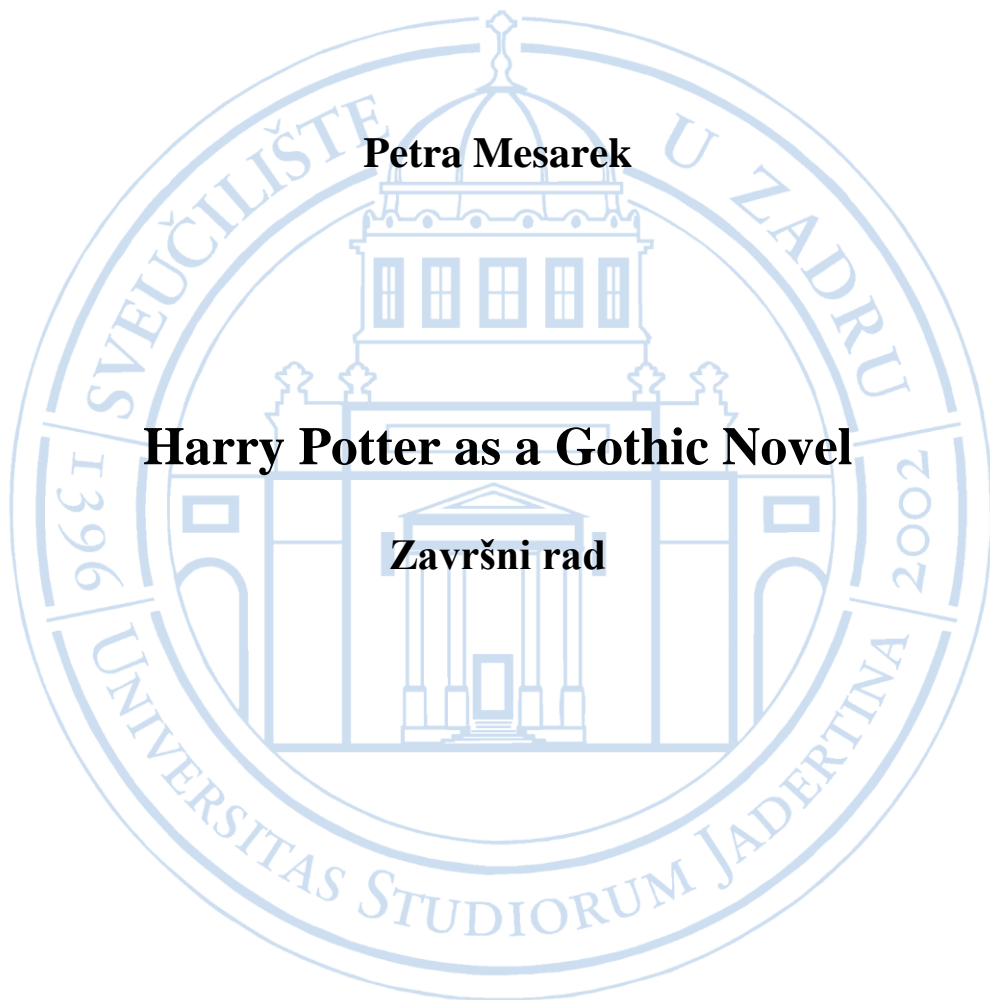
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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku  
Preddiplomski studij anglistike (dvopredmetni)



**Petra Mesarek**

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Harry Potter as a Gothic Novel

Završni rad

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Zadar, 2020.



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## 1. Introduction

Gothic fiction started its journey with Horace Walpole in 1764 when he wrote, what is today considered to be the first ever gothic novel, *Castle of Otranto*. The cultural emphasis shifted at the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was also an early stage for the Gothic genre in general. In that period, the meaning of the word *gothic* changed from its previous meaning related to the German tribe *Goths*, to its new meaning which has adopted the descriptive manner of anything relating to medieval times. And thus, *gothic* became a structural opposition for anything *classical*. While *classical* was usually associated with anything orderly and well done, *gothic* was related with chaos. *Classical* was considered to be simple and pure, and *gothic*, on the other hand, took the role of being ornate and complex. Worlds created in the *classical* genre always had clear rules and limits, while *gothic* worlds represented excess and exaggeration. “The Gothic is a genre without limits or distinction—it is generally seen as both an incubator for later genres, such as Romance, horror, fantasy, sci-fi, and the detective story, and as a retirement home for ballads and folk tales.” (Kahan 4)

A new form of poetry emerged in the 1740s and was radically different from anything that was written before it, and was given a symbolic name – graveyard poetry. In many ways it precedes the Gothic novel - its entrance to the poetry scene was quite sudden and dramatic. Its main poetic themes were night, ruins, death, and ghosts, alongside graves and churchyards. “Graveyard poetry, rejecting human vices and vanities through an insistence on mortality, encouraged an interest in ruins, tombs and nocturnal gloom as the frontiers that opened on to an afterlife of infinite bliss.” (Botting 15). Its purpose was to attack those who believe that nature’s purpose is merely to serve human needs. The focus of this kind of poetry was on the major limitations of human pretentious to rational understanding of the meaning and workings of the cosmos. Graveyard poetry shifts the value of reason for value of feeling. Furthermore, it then expands to the feeling of sublime which is marked by overwhelming the mind by

something greater than itself. And often this feeling of sublime is also accompanied by the feeling of terror.

Ganmote (2019) states that Gothic novel has the atmosphere of a mystery, turbulence, terror, it is full of insanity, rage, fallacy and the spirit of vengeance. To achieve this sort of feelings in readers, gothic novels have developed certain elements which have to be followed in order to call a piece of work gothic. Ruston (2014) argues that the Gothic genre has roots within fairytale and folktale due to the strong sense in morality. However, many readers do not see fairytales as part of the Gothic genre due to 'Disney' purifying the perception of fairytales.

Joanne Rowling, or best known as J.K. Rowling, is an extraordinary author who wrote the best-selling series ever created – Harry Potter Series. Her books have since been translated into eighty languages and won numerous awards. Nonetheless, the series has always been presented as children's novels, although the author herself imagined them as more of a 'coming of age' novels since the readers grow up at the same pace as the main characters of the series. Authors Berndt and Steveker (2011) argue that the Gothic genre is detectable throughout all Harry Potter novels and become more prominent as the series progresses. "...as the protagonists grow older and the threat of Voldemort's attack becomes more imminent, the novels develop an increasingly Gothic potential by rendering questions of moral responsibility and the distinction between 'good' and 'evil' in a much more earnest and sombre way." (40) In order to prove a piece of text as part of the Gothic genre it must contain five crucial elements; atmosphere and setting, the past, the supernatural, heroes, heroines, and villains, and mystery. The gothic elements in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series novels are scattered throughout the seven books and if examined can confirm that the Harry Potter Series novels are based on gothic structure.

In order to prove that the Harry Potter series can in fact be qualified as a Gothic text, each of the books within the series will be inspected on the premise of the five basic elements of the Gothic genre - starting with atmosphere and setting, onto the past, the supernatural, heroes, heroines and villains, and ends with mystery. This analysis will include citations from the Harry Potter books and Gothic theories of authors such as Botting, Hogle, Ruston, and other relevant theorists.



## 2. Atmosphere and setting

Gothic novels are novels based on horror or terror. The mood of the novel is dark and threatening. Anything creepy could happen at any given moment. The setting of the novels greatly helps establishing this threatening feeling. In the Harry Potter books some of the places that evoke that eerie feeling are Hogwarts, the Forbidden Forest, Knockturn Alley, the Riddle House and the graveyard, Grimmauld Place, and the labyrinth from the Triwizard Tournament. The reason these places are so dark and creepy is because of the element of the unknown. It is always uncertain what may happen there.

In the sense of the gothic novel, the association with castles, ruins, abandoned houses and haunted hotels is a must. This can be detected from the very beginning of the gothic genre with Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764). The main setting is the castle itself in which terrible and supposedly supernatural occurrences happen. "Often set in ancient, partially ruined castles or mansions haunted by the real or apparent threat of a supernatural presence, its cast of characters typically includes a mysterious and threatening older man, a vulnerable heroine and a character who is poised ambiguously between good and evil" (Hopkins 11). Many novels of the gothic genre use settings such as shacks in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), or the ruined manors in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), or even common streets and forests in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1879). Ruston (2014) argues that Rowling uses such spaces and adaptations of these Gothic places to haunt the main protagonists in the series psychologically (through memories and dreams) and physically (through supernatural beings such as ghosts or enchanted objects).

### 2.1. Hogwarts castle

The first setting that ticks off the gothic element chart is the *Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry*. It is the perfect setting for any gothic novel; it is an enormous castle

situated at the edge of the Great Lake. Its grounds are surrounded by the Forbidden Forrest, enhancing the feeling of eeriness and terror of the unknown.

“The narrow path had opened suddenly on to the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.” (*Harry Potter; and the Philosopher’s Stone* 83)

This passage can be compared to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) as it expresses the same feelings of admiration and curiosity towards the castle itself. In addition to its architectural astonishment, this centuries-old building has hidden passageways, trap doors, staircases that move, rooms which can vanish and reappear, and secret tunnels which lead to the village of Hogsmead. The castle is known to have seven secret tunnels which lead to different locations. One of them leads to the Shrieking Shack – another setting which fits the gothic novel. Shrieking Shack was believed to have been the most haunted place in Britain. It was given this title because of the many screams that could be heard coming from it at the nights of the full moon. This is later revealed as a misconception because the moans and the screams came from a werewolf and his friends rather than ghosts.

Another seemingly common thing that is usually quite dull and in most houses even ignored is the staircase. In Hogwarts, nothing is ever as it seems at the first sight. Not even stairs or doors are as sturdy and immovable as they are in normal housing situations.

“There were a hundred and forty-two staircases at Hogwarts: wide, sweeping ones; narrow, rickety ones; some that led somewhere different on a Friday; some with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to remember to jump. Then there were doors that wouldn’t open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren’t really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending.” (*Harry Potter: and the Philosopher’s Stone* 98)

Due to this fact of moving staircases and doors that vanish and re-appear the Hogwarts castle portrays another crucial element of the Gothic genre – failure of the map. Failure of the map is a concept in which the main protagonist is unable to escape the castle due to many hallways, trap doors, tunnels and other such inconveniences that prevent him from finding his way out. Harry and Ron, two out of three main characters in the novels, get lost in the castle on one too many occasions, which lead them to other misfortunate adventures such as encountering a giant three-headed dog.

This kinds of unpredictable events create an unsettling atmosphere, were the reader is never certain where the main character may end up. As the series progresses and Harry faces many adventures, more and more grounds and rooms of the castle are explored and discovered. In the second book *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998) a new and exciting - previously unknown - setting is revealed – the Chamber of Secrets. The Chamber of Secrets is a hidden room built by Salazar Slytherin at the very beginning, when the castle was still under construction. Throughout this second book, the creepy feeling of not knowing where this chamber is or what purpose does it serve makes the atmosphere of the whole book filled with terror. In addition, when the chamber is opened by Ginny Weasley the message on the wall is written in blood. The location of the chamber itself is quite unusual one as well. The entrance to it is hidden behind a sink in the girl's bathroom on the first floor, and the only way to access it is if the person trying to enter knows how to speak parseltounge<sup>1</sup>. Then, after going through a series of tunnels, next obstacle is a giant door guarded by stone serpents which also requires parseltounge to be opened.

The second instalment of the Harry Potter series perhaps carries the most gothic atmosphere. Throughout the book, there is tension and suspense everywhere. The mentioning

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<sup>1</sup> Parseltounge – an ability to talk to snakes

of horrible events happening is in almost every chapter and the reader certainly feels that unexplainable feeling of terror.

However, this is not only valid for the second work of Joanna Rowling, but as the series moves forward and Harry gets closer and closer to knowing the truth and destroying Voldemort's terror upon muggle<sup>2</sup>-borns and wizards alike, the atmosphere of the novels becomes darker and darker with each addition. In the final book, *The Deathly Hollows* (2007), the Hogwarts castle becomes a battleground in one of the most epic battles to be fought inside the pages of a book. Here the reader discovers another new feature of the castle that was previously kept hidden – all the statues inside the castle can move and even fight against the vast army Voldemort has gathered.

## 2.2. The Forbidden Forest

As before mentioned, the Hogwarts castle grounds are surrounded by thick black woods which carries the name of the Forbidden Forest. This setting fits the gothic genre very well and even has some resemblance with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1879) setting of wilderness. What makes this forest so interesting is that the headmaster Dumbledore forbids all pupils to visit it, or even come near it at their first supper upon entering the school. All the older students already know why this is so – the forest is full of beasts, but no one actually knows what kind of beasts lay within it. In this way it becomes an unknown territory that has all kinds of animals and supernatural beings lurking behind the trees and in the thick fog. It is a place in which anything could happen in any given moment, which is why each visit is a suspenseful experience.

Harry's first adventure to the Forbidden Forest was in fact a result of a detention. Upon his arrival at the edge of the woods, Hagrid explains that a unicorn has been hurt and is possibly dying, and their task for the night is to find it. Therefore, the first beast which is

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<sup>2</sup> Muggle – a person with no magical powers

confirmed to be living in the Forbidden Forest is a unicorn. Upon continuing their search for the unicorn the lot comes across another mystical being that lives in the forest – a centaur. However, these beasts are friendly and do not fit into the eerie and creepy setting of a gothic novel. Nonetheless, in this same outing into the Forest, Harry crosses paths with one more being. Only described as a hooded figure, this monster feels the most dangerous and the most frightening of them all. It committed a crime against nature by killing the most innocent magic creature – a unicorn. For a young boy of eleven years, and even a reader who might be the same age as the main character, this scene is as horrific as it can get.

Other than beasts, the Forbidden Forest houses an abandoned car. More precisely, a Ford Anglia which belonged to Arthur Weasley before Harry and Ron stole it. This car was magically enhanced to be able to fly and also be made invisible. However, at the beginning of book two, Harry and Ron crash it into the Womping Willow and it escapes into the Forbidden Forest never to be seen again. Or at least that is what the main characters thought.

In *The Chamber of Secrets* (1998) another monster that lives in the darkness of the Forest is discovered. A giant spider, also known as an acromantula, named Aragog lives in the Forest with his growing family. He used to be Hagrid's pet, but due to unfortunate events he was hidden in the Forest, away from the castle. Besides being enormously big, this species of spiders differentiated from other kinds of spiders by being able to talk.

*The Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) puts a highlight on yet another monster that inhabit the dark woods at the edge of the castle grounds – werewolves. Even though the speculations about werewolves living in the Forbidden Forest were made at the beginning of *The Philosopher's Stone*, these allegations were not confirmed until professor Lupin transformed at the sight of the full moon. However, it cannot be said with certainty that there are more werewolves living or that lived in the Forest.

At one point in *The Order of Phoenix* (2003) the Forbidden Forest was also a home to a giant. Hagrid was concerned for his little brother being bullied by other giants he used to live with, so he made him a home in the heart of the Forbidden Forest.

### 2.3. Knockturn Alley

When Harry learns that he is a wizard, Hagrid takes him shopping for his school supplies at the Diagon Alley. It is a hidden Alley in the yard of a pub called the Leaky Cauldron which can only be accessed through a magical brick wall, in which one must tap the correct order of the bricks to enter it. It is not until *The Chamber of Secrets* (1998) that another magical alley is presented to the reader. Opposite Diagon Alley lays a street filled with all kinds of dark magic practices and shops with mysterious cursed objects called Knockturn Alley. Harry mistakenly finds himself there after mispronouncing the selected location while travelling through floo powder. He finds himself in a mysterious shop filled with curious objects. He, as well as the reader, is unable to recognize the place and thus puts a dose of fear into the scene.

“A glass case nearby held a withered hand on a cushion, a bloodstained pack of cards, and a staring glass eye. Evil-looking masks stared down from the walls, an assortment of human bones lay upon the counter, and rusty, spiked instruments hung from the ceiling. Even worse, the dark, narrow street Harry could see through the dusty shop window was definitely not Diagon Alley.” (*Harry Potter; and the Chamber of Secrets* 43)

The extract above only proves what kind of artefacts and creepy goods were sold in Knockturn Alley. It is a place where all the wizards practicing Dark Arts go to for supply. As it is described, it is a nasty place to be for a frightened twelve year old. The shops at this place are not as fun and full of colours as they are in Diagon Alley. Here shops sell shrunken heads, cages with live giant black spiders and poisonous candles. People who shop in this street are

of no good and should definitely be feared. The witches and wizards described in this passage make one feel uneasy and send shivers down one's spine.

#### 2.4. Grimmauld Place

Grimmauld Place is the most unique setting in the Harry Potter world. It is the home of family Black, but it may also be Burgin & Burkes with the amount of Dark Artefacts that can be found in it. Besides artefacts, inside the house some eerie creatures can be found as well. However, Grimmauld Place was still used as a headquarters for the Order of Phoenix. To be able to use the house for this purpose, the members of the Order (mainly Molly Weasley) had to clear out all the dark magic related items. House Black is located at number twelve Grimmauld Place in London, situated between houses hidden to the muggle eye. The house "emerged out of nowhere between numbers eleven and thirteen, followed swiftly by dirty walls and grimy windows. It was as though an extra house had inflated, pushing those on either side out of its way." (*Harry Potter; and the Order of Phoenix* 59)

The house was guarded by and served by a house elf named Kreacher. Due to his long exposure to this evil and unpleasant atmosphere inside the house and the overall poor treatment towards him by his masters, Kreacher became grumpy and evil himself. Moreover, he was extremely rude and hostile against those who were not of pure blood (both magical parents), even though his nature is to be obedient and polite to wizards of any kind. Kreacher came from a long line of house elves who served the House Black and the family that resided in it. When an elf would die, the members of the family would cut off its head and put it up on a plaque and hang it on a wall in the stairway.

„...they started up the dark staircase, passing a row of shrunken heads mounted on plaques on the wall. A closer look showed Harry that the heads belonged to house-elves. All of them had the same rather snout-like nose." (*Harry Potter; and the Order of Phoenix* 61)

The house had another fairly unusual item that made everyone move cautiously around the main hall. Covered with a moth-eaten curtain hanged an enormous portrait of a woman, Sirius Black's mother. She, as the rest of her family, believed in the pure blood status and terrorized anyone who had mixed blood, or as they would call it 'mudblood'. If the curtain was lifted and she was awakened, a terrible screaming and screeching commenced.

"The old woman was drooling, her eyes were rolling, the yellowing skin of her face stretched taut as she screamed, and all along the hall behind them, the other portraits awoke and began to yell too, so that Harry actually screwed up his eyes at the noise and clapped his hands over his ears." (*Harry Potter; and the Order of Phoenix* 77)

Besides portraits, other supernatural beings habituated House Black. In the attic, lies the most magnificent creature of them all – a hippogriff named Buckbeak. Others include doxies inside the curtains in the drawing room, a nest of dead puffskeins under the sofa and also a boggart hidden inside a locket cabinet. Doxies are small fairy like creatures with very sharp teeth that are poisonous. Probably the most frightening creature that the magical world has conjured is a boggart. No one really knows what it looks like, the person who sees it does not see its true form but rather it takes the form of what that person's greatest fear is. In this way it is the most horrible creature one could ever encounter.

"Mrs. Weasley sobbed, pointing her shaking wand at Ron's body. *Crack*. Ron's body turned into Bill's, spread-eagled on his back, his eyes wide open and empty. Mrs. Weasley sobbed harder than ever. "R-riddikulus!" she sobbed again. *Crack*. Mr. Weasley's body replaced Bill's, his glasses askew, a trickle of blood running down his face. "No!" Mrs. Weasley moaned. "No . . . riddikulus! Riddikulus! RIDDIKULUS!" *Crack*. Dead twins. *Crack*. Dead Percy. *Crack*. Dead Harry . . ." (*Harry Potter; and the Order of Phoenix* 175-176)



This extract describes Molly Weasley's encounter with a boggart and the way in which it frightens its victim by showing them the thing they fear the most. In Molly's case it showed the death of her family members and Harry's death.

## 2.5. The Riddle House and the graveyard

Gothic genre's most prominent feature and the most recognizable one are graveyards. From the early beginnings graveyards have made their mark on the gothic era. Not to mention Graveyard poetry, a movement which was founded on the aesthetic opportunities of graveyards. In the fourth instalment of the Harry Potter series, *The Goblet of Fire*, J.K. Rowling uses the same aesthetic values to portray the graveyard in which lord Voldemort returns to life.

However, the more gruesome and terrible is the Riddle House. Being known as a grand mansion that once housed a rich family Riddle, it has now become a topic for gossips after an utterly disturbing occurrence happened in it. It was since abandoned and neglected, becoming a kind of a ruin.

"It stood on a hill overlooking the village, some of its windows boarded, tiles missing from its roof, and ivy spreading unchecked over its face. Once a fine-looking manor, and easily the largest and grandest building for miles around, the Riddle House was now damp, derelict, and unoccupied." (*Harry Potter; and the Goblet of Fire* 1)

This description of the Riddle House may be compared to the description of Usher House from the short story of Edgar Allan Poe *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839). The feeling of depression and dreariness fill the readers mind as one reads the passages describing the appearance and state of these two houses.

The story behind this derelict house is even more terror-stricken than its outside look. Fifty years prior to this state of the Riddle House, a family of three was murdered in it. A mother, Mrs Riddle, a father, Mr Riddle, and their grown-up son named Tom. All the

villagers were shocked but even more concerned about the murderer since there were no signs or evidence on who might have done it. There were no wounds on the bodies, no death-causing injuries or any other implications they were harmed. Their eyes were wide open and their skin ice cold. Moreover, there were no signs of force entering, robbery or any other way a murderer may have come in to the house. After an autopsy was performed on all three bodies, the doctors still had no evidence that would show how the family died.

„The doctors did note (as though determined to find something wrong with the bodies) that each of the Riddles had a look of terror upon his or her face — but as the frustrated police said, whoever heard of three people being *frightened* to death?“ (*Harry Potter; and the Goblet of Fire* 4)

Having no other explanation other than being frightened to death, the dose of fear and even terror is amplified, making the Riddle House ever so frightening place. It keeps the secret of how the family died, what exactly happened to them and who or what was so devastatingly scary three adults died of fear from it.

The Riddle House becomes the new headquarters for lord Voldemort and Wormtail. The scene describing Voldemort’s killing of an old gardener Frank Bryce can shake anyone to the core of their being. The fear of the unknown is greater than ever, since the reader cannot tell what Voldemort actually looks like but he is aware that the sight of him is petrifying – which draws the conclusion that perhaps it was Voldemort who killed the Riddle family.

## 2.6. Labyrinth from the Triwizard Tournament

The Triwizard Tournament is a long established friendly tournament organized between three European schools of wizardry: Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. The tournament takes place every five years and the schools take turns in hosting the event. Each school has to select a champion who will be representing his or hers school at the tournament. In an unexpected turn of events Harry Potter becomes the fourth champion, thus giving

Hogwarts two representatives. The champions then have three tasks they must complete in order to finish and ultimately win the tournament. The three tasks that the champions had to overcome were – stealing a golden egg from a dragon, saving a loved one from the depths of the Black Lake, and finding the Triwizard cup in an enchanted labyrinth. The latter being the most challenging but also the most eerie filled task. The walls of the maze were in fact hedges which were grown up to be twenty feet high, and it was located at the Hogwarts Quidditch<sup>3</sup> field. The maze itself, the hedges, is not an unusual task to be challenged to overcome. However, since it is the wizarding world, one must presume it is certainly not an ordinary maze. The maze was filled with magical obstacles which hinder the contestants from finding the Triwizard cup at the centre of the labyrinth.

Everything about the maze was designed to scare the contestants and the readers. Upon entering the maze the sounds of the crowd outside was immediately silenced as if there was no one miles near it. The hedges were so tall the path on which the champions walked was completely dark. With these two senses taken away from him, Harry felt very uneasy being alone in a place where anything could creep out from around the corner. Some of the obstacles that were within the maze are Hagrid's Blast-Ended Skrewts, boggarts, a sphinx who tells riddles, a giant spider also known as an acromantula, mysterious enchanted golden mist which made the world upside down, and the maze would even meddle with champion's heads and they would turn against each other. The enchanted mist is the most unusual aspect of the Labyrinth – it turned the world upside down. The reader can almost feel Harry's glasses dangling off his nose. Harry "felt as though his feet were glued to the grass, which had now become the ceiling [...] He felt as though if he tried to move one of his feet, he would fall away from the earth completely." (*Harry Potter; and the Goblet of Fire* 624)

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<sup>3</sup> Quidditch - Wizard sport; played up in the air on broomsticks with four balls and seven players on each team

Upon reaching the Triwizard cup, Harry and Cedric decided to take it together and so they both travelled through the portkey<sup>4</sup> and found themselves at a graveyard.

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<sup>4</sup> Portkey – „objects that are used to transport wizards from one spot to another at a prearranged time“ (Harry Potter: and the Goblet of Fire, 2000, p.70)

### 3. The past

Gothic novels often deal with the past in some form, whether that is that the plot takes place in previous centuries, that the setting evokes a feeling of history or age, or even that all of the problems that the characters face originated in the past. According to Hogle (2002) the past haunts the main characters psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story. The whole Harry Potter series deals with the events that occurred in the past. In each book the three main characters visit the past in some way, either by researching about it or actually going back in time. Many elements of the books relate to past. To name a few, there is the Pensieve<sup>5</sup> which contains all the memories of the past important to understanding Voldemort, ghosts wander around the castle giving students information about the past, and portraits of dead headmasters can comment on current events.

In *The Philosopher's Stone* (1997) the story of Harry Potter begins with the events of the past. This is where Harry first discovers how his parents died and what really happened when he was just one year old.

““Never wondered how you got that mark on yer forehead? That was no ordinary cut. That’s what yeh get when a powerful, evil curse touches yeh – took care of yer mum an’ dad an’ yer house, even – but it didn’t work on you, an’ that’s why yer famous, Harry.” (*Harry Potter; and the Philosopher’s Stone* 45)

After Hagrid reveals to Harry this truth that has been hidden from him his whole life it haunts him throughout the whole novel. He is seen as famous in the wizarding world, but all his life he was considered ordinary no-good boy. His aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon kept him in the dark and never told him about what really happened to his parents or who he truly was. Brushing it off as a car crash, he was completely unaware of the great things his parents did and to which he was destined to do.

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<sup>5</sup> Pensieve – a basin filled with one's thoughts and memories

*The Chamber of Secrets* (1998) holds a different kind of past that needs to be resolved. The past that is the centre of this novel is the one that does not concern Harry himself. Harry is prevented from coming back to Hogwarts by Dobby on the premise that something horrible is going to happen if he returns.

„And now, at Hogwarts, terrible things are to happen, are perhaps happening already, and Dobby cannot let Harry Potter stay here now that history is to repeat itself, now that the Chamber of Secrets is open once more.“ (*Harry Potter; and the Chamber of Secrets* 14)

The history-repeating that Dobby describes is to do with the Chamber of Secrets being opened again, after it has been opened once prior - about fifty years before. Moreover, a secret diary is discovered which holds a younger version of Voldemort. It is trapped there after Voldemort made it a horcrux and promptly haunts Ginny Weasley to do its bidding. There is also the problem of Hagrid's past which has now been put to light. When Hagrid was at Hogwarts as a student, the Chamber of Secrets was opened for the first time. Hagrid, being fond of all magical creatures, had an unusual pet mentioned before – an acromantula. After a girl was murdered in the Chamber, Hagrid was blamed and was expelled from the school.

*The Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) deals with past in a completely new and unexplored way. Due to being enrolled into too many classes which take place at the same time, Hermione was allowed to have a timeturner. Timeturner is a special device that allows the user to travel through time. In order to save Sirius Black from a deathly dementor's kiss and a hippogriff Buckbeak from an execution, Harry and Hermione go back in time; to be more exact three hours back in time. Sirius has been falsely accused of murdering his friend Peter Pettigrew and betraying his other two best friends, Harry's parents, Lily and James Potter. However, when the truth has been revealed to Harry and his friends, the Ministry is still in prosecution and Sirius is facing a death penalty. In the case of Buckbeak the hippogriff, it was insulted by Draco Malfoy and it was in its nature to defend itself, causing a minor injury to

Draco. Consequently, Draco complained to his father who then put an enquiry to the Ministry of Magic demanding his execution. When going back in time, Harry and Hermione are able to save two innocent lives from certain death.

“Dumbledore just said — just said we could save more than one innocent life...” And then it hit him. “Hermione, we’re going to save Buckbeak!”[...] We’ve got to fly Buckbeak up to the window and rescue Sirius! Sirius can escape on Buckbeak — they can escape together!”

*(Harry Potter; and the Prisoner of Azkaban 288)*

By doing this, they change the course of events, altering the future altogether and saving lives of their loved ones. Even though Sirius is still on the run in fear of prosecution at least he is alive and well.

It is also in this third novel in the series that Harry discovers more about his family and his parents. He learns that Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Peter Pettigrew, Lily and James Potter were all very close friends during their time in Hogwarts but also after their graduation. Sirius and James were best friends and James even made Sirius Harry’s godfather. It is here that Harry discovers a new guardian for himself – who is now being threatened with a death sentence. Peter Pettigrew, who was considered dead, was the one to blame for all the crimes Sirius was accused of. He was the one who told Voldemort where James and Lily were hiding, and thus became their angel of death. Voldemort did not even think twice before coming after them and killing them in their home, while Harry was the only one who survived this atrocious attack.

*The Order of Phoenix* (2003) goes into the deeper explanation of Harry’s parents’ past. Readers learn that Lily and James were part of the Order of Phoenix which is a secret society working against Voldemort and hoping for his downfall. The last two novels in the series - *The Half-blood Prince* (2005) and *The Deathly Hallows* (2007) - deal mostly about Voldemort’s past, rather than the protagonists – Harry’s. New character crucial to the

development of the story is introduced in *The Half-blood Prince* (2005) – a retired *Potions* professor Horace Slughorn. Slughorn was a teacher at Hogwarts while Voldemort was a student and was actually very fond of him and even invited him into his Slug Club. Harry's new task for the year was to get the proper memory out of Slughorn in order to understand how to defeat Voldemort. Professor Slughorn was so embarrassed and scared to show the real memory he has of Voldemort that he replaced it with another he came up with and started believing it legitimately happened.

“As you might have noticed,” said Dumbledore, reseating himself behind his desk, “that memory has been tampered with.” “Tampered with?” repeated Harry, sitting back down too. “Certainly,” said Dumbledore. “Professor Slughorn has meddled with his own recollections.” (*Harry Potter; and the Half-blood Prince* 371)

In the world of Harry Potter, even memories can be altered to one's desire. Dumbledore was convinced that Voldemort has indeed created horcruxes<sup>6</sup> in order to become immortal and thus invincible. This is a start of Harry's journey in which he tries to discover and destroy these horcruxes. To be able to fulfil his intention, Harry must learn everything about Voldemort's past, to know how to find each one and ultimately how to destroy it. Dumbledore takes him on an expedition to recover one such item that was hidden in a cave which Voldemort once visited while he was still a child. Every part of Voldemort's past had to be revealed in order for his downfall to be successful and complete. Dumbledore used a special device called Pensieve to store all his memories of Voldemort but also memories of other people who had knowledge about Voldemort's past.

Hogle (2002) argues that the past and the haunting of the past can take many forms, of which ghosts, spectres and monsters are the most frequent ones within the Gothic genre. They tend to „rise from within the antiquated space, or sometimes invade it from alien realms, to

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<sup>6</sup> Horcrux – „the word used for an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul“ (*Harry Potter: and the Half-blood Prince*, 2005, p.497)



manifest unresolved crimes or conflicts that can no longer be successfully buried from view. “ (Hogle 3) The past in *Harry Potter* series is therefore displayed through portraits and ghosts. As was before mentioned, portraits in the wizarding world can move and even take a little after the person painted. The portraits of former headmasters at the headmaster’s office can comment on current events happening at the school, give advice and even help in emergencies.

Ghosts on the other hand, can teach the students in the school about the past or about their own lives. Ghosts roam around the castle and often engage in conversation with students, talking about anything that may interest young witches and wizards. Therefore it is not unusual that the History of Magic teacher, professor Binns, is in fact a ghost and not a real person. The story behind a ghost being a History professor is in fact a pretty simple one - „Professor Binns had been very old indeed when he had fallen asleep in front of the staff-room fire and got up next morning to teach, leaving his body behind him.“ (*Harry Potter; and the Philosopher’s Stone* 99)

#### 4. The Supernatural

No Gothic novel can exist without some ghosts, haunted castles and seemingly magical events. According to Todorov (1975), there are two types of supernatural occurrences in Gothic novels, the “supernatural explained” and “supernatural accepted”. Supernatural explained refers to events that are rationally explained at the end of the novel, and supernatural accepted refers to events which appear to be actually supernatural. When it comes to Harry Potter books, the supernatural falls into the second category proposed by Todorov - nobody questions if there is an alternative explanation for the student’s interactions with ghosts. Instead, readers accept magic and supernatural as valid explanations for what happens.

To start off, ghosts are the most common feature of the Wizarding world in Harry Potter. They are introduced in the first book *The Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) as house patrons, and continue to appear in all of the novels in the series. Each Hogwarts house has its own patron ghost, to protect or more to entertain its students. For Gryffindor house that is Nearly Headless Nick, for Slytherin it is Bloody Baron, for Hufflepuffs it is the Fat Friar and for Ravenclaws it is the Grey Lady or also known as Helena Ravenclaw. According to Ruston (2014) the most Gothic of the house patrons is the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw, daughter of the Ravenclaw house founder, for it is implied that she was raped and murdered by Slytherin’s ghost – Bloody Baron (who got his name because of the blood stains on his clothes which appeared when he killed Helena).

Besides friendly house patron ghosts there is one particular poltergeist named Peeves who terrorizes staff and students of Hogwarts. Peeves differ from usual Gothic poltergeists in a sense that he is not blood-thirsty or eager to frighten people. He is especially known for pulling pranks, getting students into trouble or otherwise cause havoc. Moreover, ghosts appear in other unusual situations – in *The Goblet of Fire* (2000) when Harry’s and

Voldemort's wand connect at the graveyard, the ghosts of the people Voldemort's last killed appear to Harry and guide him to safety. Another such occurrence appears in *The Deathly Hollows* (2007) when Harry is in the Forbidden Forest, about to walk into his own death. While holding the Resurrection Stone, Harry's parents, his godfather Sirius and their friend Remus Lupin appeared to him for support and guidance. As Ruston (2014) says the use of ghosts in Harry Potter is rather similar to other Gothic texts which use them to serve a purpose, tell a prophecy, to caution, to protect or to destroy.

All the paintings inside the Hogwarts castle move and the portraits are able to speak and converse among each other, or jump into one another's painting which adds to this ghostly presence.

"The people in the portraits kept going to visit each other and Harry was sure the coats of armour could walk. [...]He was too sleepy even to be surprised that the people in the portraits along the corridors whispered and pointed as they passed..." (*Harry Potter; and the Philosopher's Stone* 96)

To any normal human being this kind of behaviour is strange and unusual since photographs and paintings do not have the tendency to move in the real world.

The supernatural creature that fits the gothic genre the most and which produces the most dreadful feeling imaginable is a dementor – a guard of the Azkaban prison. Dementor is a creature that feeds on happiness, leaving behind only terror and desperation. The room it enters becomes freezing cold and it conjures the overwhelming feeling of sadness, as if one can never be happy ever again.

"Standing in the doorway, illuminated by the shivering flames in Lupin's hand, was a cloaked figure that towered to the ceiling. Its face was completely hidden beneath its hood. Harry's eyes darted downward, and what he saw made his stomach contract. There was a hand protruding from the cloak and it was glistening, grayish, slimy-looking, and scabbed, like

something dead that had decayed in water. [...]And then the thing beneath the hood, whatever it was, drew a long, slow, rattling breath, as though it were trying to suck something more than air from its surroundings. An intense cold swept over them all. Harry felt his own breath catch in his chest. The cold went deeper than his skin. It was inside his chest, it was inside his very heart... “(*Harry Potter; and the Prisoner of Azkaban* 60)

Just the thought of the rotten hand under the cloak can pop into one's head days and even years after reading this passage which makes a dementor such a memorable supernatural being.

The most excruciating sentence a prisoner can get is dementor's kiss. It is a process in which a dementor opens up its jaw to its victim and sucks the soul out of them. As Professor Lupin describes, a human can still exist without his soul, as long as his brain is still working. However, one does not have the sense of self anymore, no memory and no chance of recovery. One becomes an empty shell and the soul is forever lost. (Rowling 178-9)

Other supernatural occurrences regard wizard transportation. The first kind of transportation that takes place in Hogwarts and is utterly abnormal is flying on a broomstick. There have been many tales told where witches fly on broomsticks, and so this notion has been carried out in *Harry Potter* as well. Other methods include floo powder, which allows the user to travel through fireplaces, portkeys, which are disguised as trash or other unusual objects and then take the user to the desired place, and apparation. Apparation is learned in year seven at Hogwarts and it enables the user to virtually disappear from one place and appear in another in mere seconds.

## 5. Heroes, Heroines, and Villains

Gothic novels usually have a hero or heroine, but do not always have a clear-cut villain. More often than not, the heroes and heroines do not choose to become heroes or heroines, but rather they are forced into it by circumstances which require of them to act in a brave and heroic ways (which they would normally avoid). In this way, Harry Potter is similar to those heroes. He never chooses to be the hero; he hates the fame and attention his accomplishments have brought him. Harry does not go out looking for mysteries to solve or villains to defeat, those things seem to come to him. "One of the most distinctive features Rowling's visions of heroism is that they thrive on sympathy and compassion rather than merely resulting from physical strength, dominance or superior power of any kind." (Berndt, Steveker 2). The villains Rowling has created blur the boundary between good and evil. Dolores Umbridge and Severus Snape are two which seem to cross from good to bad and from bad to good. Voldemort as the ultimate villain of the novel is portrayed as pure evil. The effect his actions have on the reader differ with the age the reader is and in which decade the reader grew up in. Voldemort's emphasis on pure-bloods and his destruction of muggles may remind many of Hitler and the horrors associated with World War II. Botting (1996) states that the Gothic villains strive to usurp rightful heirs, rob reputable families of property and reputation while threatening the honour of their family which is the exact description of Voldemort's acts in the *Harry Potter* novels. In the minds of these Gothic villains the virtue is replaced with vice, reason with desire and law with tyranny.

### 5.1. Severus Snape

The character whose moral compass cannot be explained as purely evil or purely good is Severus Snape. Rowling wrote this character in such a way that in the first few novels it seems like he is the main villain, even greater threat to Harry than Voldemort himself. However, it is later discovered that Snape was the one helping Harry and watching after him,

which would then make him a good character after all. Nonetheless, not many can agree that just by keeping Harry safe he redeemed himself for all the bad behaviour and abusing he made his students endure.

“Longbottom, at the end of this lesson we will feed a few drops of this potion to your toad and see what happens. Perhaps that will encourage you to do it properly.” Snape moved away, leaving Neville breathless with fear.“ (*Harry Potter; and the Prisoner of Azkaban* 91)

To become a teacher one must firstly be fond of children and teaching. Not to mention that making snarky remarks towards their appearance or not providing aid when needed is a major trespass of authority. Moreover, a student should not be so deathly afraid of their teacher that if they come across a boggart it takes the shape of the student’s teacher. Even though in the grand scheme of things that occurred in the Harry Potter novels, Snape decided to be on the right side and for that he deserves to be acknowledged as a good character. But up until that point, it seemed he was the villain working closely with Voldemort and many others of his followers. However, his actions cannot hold ground because of his obscene personality and abusive behaviour.

Moreover, Snape can be put into the Satanic hero-villain category whose “nefarious deeds and justifications of them make him a more interesting character than the rather bland good hero”. (Thompson, [epublications.marquette.edu](http://epublications.marquette.edu)) In his case the hero-villain is reversed – at first he seems as the villain but eventually he becomes the hero of the series by sacrificing himself for the greater cause of destroying Voldemort’s supremacy.

## 5.2. Dolores Umbridge

Dolores Umbridge appeared for the first time in *The Order of Phoenix* (2003) and was immediately disliked for her behaviour. One cannot tell if she is on the good side or the bad

side. Her beliefs are strange and quite brutal, but she herself does not follow Voldemort. She is rather obedient to the Ministry of Magic, and thus in some way does help Voldemort since the Ministry is corrupted. To the students of Hogwarts she definitely seems like the ultimate villain, posting all sorts of decrees and severe punishments for disobeying them. Even though on the outside, her appearance seems harmless and even likeable but her tactics for running a school full of underage pupil are merciless to say the least. At the mentioning of Voldemort's comeback she proclaims a detention to Harry, in which he is required to write "I must not tell lies" on a piece of paper with a quill which seems to have no ink in it. That is due to the fact that the letters coming out of the quill do not appear on the paper but rather on the skin of the person holding it.

"He looked back at the parchment, placed the quill upon it once more, wrote I must not tell lies, and felt the searing pain on the back of his hand for a second time; once again the words had been cut into his skin, once again they healed over seconds later. And on it went. Again and again Harry wrote the words on the parchment in what he soon came to realize was not ink, but his own blood. And again and again the words were cut into the back of his hand, healed, and then reappeared the next time he set quill to parchment." (*Harry Potter; and the Order of Phoenix* 267)

Not only is this form of detention cruel and brutal, it is also revengeful for not obeying by her (untrue) words. However, if taken into consideration Umbridge was trying to make Hogwarts a better place for the students, even though all her methods were wrong and merely abusive to the students, in which case it is safe to presume she was more driven by evil than by good.

### 5.3. Lord Voldemort

The ultimate villain that is presented in all seven instalments of the series is lord Voldemort or also known as Tom Riddle. There is no discussion whether this character may

be good or bad, he was written as a pure evil incapable of even knowing what good is. Being born as a result of a love potion rather than true love, Voldemort is incapable of feeling love, apathy or friendship. His moral compass does not even exist and everything he does is purely for his own satisfaction and personal goals. Ruston (2014) claims that Voldemort's goal as a villain is to overpower the magical world and enslave the non-magical world because he strives to enforce a pure-bred magical race. Many associate Voldemort with Hitler during the World War II because their ideology seems quite similar. Voldemort was utterly convinced that only the pure-blood wizards and witches deserve to live and are appreciated while those with no wizard blood (also known as 'mudblood') or just ordinary people who do not know a magical world exists (also known as 'muggles') have to die. As in the example with Hitler where he believed that only people of the Aryan race (people with blue eyes and blonde hair) should survive while others (especially Jews) had to die the most horrible deaths. It is quite ironic considering Hitler was not of Aryan race and Voldemort's parentage was mixed, therefore neither qualified for their own criteria.



## 6. Mystery

Gothic novels usually contain some kind of mystery that requires to be solved by the hero or heroine. The villain may have a secret about their past that must be uncovered in order for them to be defeated. Even secrets about the hero or heroine's past or family may help them defeat the villain, protect themselves from harm, or give them previously unknown information about their parents. In Harry Potter, the three main characters usually have to solve mysteries involving Voldemort and his past. Throughout the series, mysteries involving past, dreams, and current events must be solved so that Voldemort can be defeated.

In *The Order of Phoenix* (2003) after numerous dreams that somehow were connected to Voldemort's mind occurred and scared Harry, Harry and his friends, fellow students at Hogwarts, make their way to the Ministry of Magic to recover a hidden prophecy which determines the outcome of the war they are in. The only one who can hear it and uncover it is the person the prophecy is about. This is the reason Voldemort lured Harry into the Ministry – the prophecy was about Harry. The prophecy states that “The one with the power to vanquish the dark lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... And the dark lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the dark lord knows not... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... The one with the power to vanquish the dark lord will be born as the seventh month dies..” (*Harry Potter; and the Order of Phoenix* 841) This prophecy is why Voldemort chooses Harry as his opponent. Coincidentally, Neville Longbottom was also born at the end of July, just as Harry. Neville's parents also fought against Voldemort in the first war. It is this choice that Voldemort makes of choosing Harry over Neville that marks them as eternal enemies, who can be stopped only by the hands of the other.

The main task Harry, Hermione and Ron are presented with is discovering horcruxes that Voldemort made in order to be able to defeat him once and for all.

“Then I’ve got to track down the rest of the Horcruxes, haven’t I?” said Harry, his eyes upon Dumbledore’s white tomb, reflected in the water on the other side of the lake. [...] I’ve got to find them and destroy them, and then I’ve got to go after the seventh bit of Voldemort’s soul, the bit that’s still in his body, and I’m the one who’s going to kill him.” (*Harry Potter; and the Deathly Hallows* 651)

In *The Half-blood Prince* (2005) and *The Deathly Hollows* (2007), the trio starts their journey in an attempt to discover and destroy them. Without any trace of a clue where to begin, they leave Hogwarts and their homes to search for these unknown artefacts which may change the course of war they are in.

## 7. Conclusion

J.K. Rowling wrote the Harry Potter series intended as children's books but the mix of genres that can be detected put it in a whole another category. Gothic genre is certainly among them and easily the one quickest to detect. Moreover, the children (and adults) reading the series can relate to the struggles and fears of the main characters or even some of the side characters since there are so many. Each of them being delicately described and thoughtfully put into the story. As Ganmote (2019) described, the author constantly used suitable vocabulary set to create and maintain the gothic atmosphere, which then continuously appropriated the gothic feeling. Even though gothic genre is the last thing to be associated with a book intended for children at the age eleven onward, there are many elements of it that can be found in each instalment of the series. Their purpose, however, remains the same – to introduce the feeling of the unknown and to excite the reader. Moreover, Ruston (2014) argues that Harry Potter series is worthy of being a part of the Gothic genre, but the extent of it depends on individual opinion (as is the case with most Gothic texts, classic and contemporary), furthermore, it certainly belongs to a sub-genre of the Gothic such as *Children's-Gothic* or *Gothic-Fantasy*. By dissecting the series on the basis of five Gothic elements which are required to be possessed in order to describe a novel as Gothic, it can be said with certainty that the Harry Potter series belongs in the Gothic spectre. The atmosphere becomes darker and darker throughout the series while the settings in which the action takes place tick off the Gothic checklist. Supernatural occurrences and beings do not lack, while the past is explored in nearly every instalment of the series – whether it be by talking about, discovering it or travelling back in time. The main hero, Harry Potter, fits in to the Gothic hero category immaculately – not only does he not want to be the hero of the story, he seems to win against evil on pure luck. On the other hand, villains of the story cannot be described as clear cut characters - good or bad (aside from Voldemort). Furthermore, the one element

which cannot be ignored is the mystery. Strange prophecies and the search for the horcruxes dominate the series and the suspense of knowing is greater than ever. The readers are never sure where and how the next one might appear which gives the novels a dose of the exciting unknown.

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## 9. HARRY POTTER AS A GOTHIC NOVEL: Summary and key words

The main goal of this paper is to provide an analysis of the Harry Potter series as gothic novels rather than children's books. The paper begins with an introduction to gothic genre and the Harry Potter series in general. The next chapters then focus on the five elements required for a novel to be called a work of gothic fiction. The first one is atmosphere and setting which explains how various places in the Harry Potter novels fit into the setting of a gothic novel. Then, the work continues on to the chapter about the past - relating gothic usage of past to Rowling's use of it in her own novels. Following it is a chapter about supernatural creatures and occurrences which match with the gothic genre. The next chapter deals with heroes, heroines, and villains of the stories mainly focusing on Severus Snape, Dolores Umbridge and most importantly Lord Voldemort. The penultimate chapter focuses on mystery that is seen throughout the Harry Potter novels, while the final chapter gives a conclusion on whether the Harry Potter novels are indeed worthy of being called gothic novels.

Key words: gothic genre, Harry Potter series, atmosphere and setting, the past, the supernatural, heroes and villains, mystery

## 10. HARRY POTTER KAO GOTIČKI ROMAN: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Cilj ovoga rada je pružiti uvid u analizu serije knjiga o Harry Potteru kao gotičkog romana umjesto knjige za djecu. Rad započinje uvodom o gotičkom žanru i općenito serijom knjiga o Harry Potteru. Sljedeća poglavlja fokusiraju se na pet elemenata koje roman treba posjedovati kako bi se mogao nazvati djelom gotičke fikcije. Prvo je atmosfera i mjesto koje objašnjava kako različita mjesta u Harry Potter romanima pripadaju mjestima u gotičkim fikcijama. Tada se rad nastavlja na poglavlje o prošlosti – povezuje gotičko korištenje prošlosti s korištenjem prošlosti u knjigama koje je napisala Rowling. Sljedeće je poglavlje o nadnaravnim bićima i događajima koji odgovaraju gotičkom žanru. Iduće poglavlje bavi se herojima, heroinama i zlikovcima priče koje se uglavnom fokusira na Severusa Snapea, Dolores Umbridge, i najvažnije Lorda Voldemorta. Pretposljednje poglavlje usredotočilo se na misteriji koja se može vidjeti kroz sve romane o Harry Potteru, dok završno poglavlje daje zaključak o tome jesu li knjige o Harry Potteru doista dostojne zvati se gotičkim romanima.

Ključne riječi: gotički žanr, knjige o Harry Potteru, atmosfera i mjesto, prošlost, nadnaravno, heroji i zlikovci, misterij