



## The Lapis of Metaphor for Visual Hybridisation in the Harry Potter Films

by  
Vincent Geldenhuyf  
97076709

Dissertation submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
MAGISTER ARTIUM in the subject VISUAL STUDIES

at the  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
SUPERVISOR: DR AA DU PREEZ  
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**A SIGNIFICATION IN STONE:  
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Cover image developed from a rendering of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden by Sebald Beharne (in Black 2007:65), and combined with images from *Harry Potter and Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuaron 2004), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007). Border ornamentation from the cover of *The History of Magic* (Lévi 2001).

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*“What use are torches, light or eyeglasses, if people will not see?”* Vignette from Heinrich Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum sapientiae* (in Klossowski de Rola 1997:23)

## SUMMARY

Title of dissertation: A signification in stone: the *lapis* as a metaphor for visual hybridisation in the Harry Potter films.

Name of student: Vincent Marcel Geldenhuys  
Supervisor: Dr Amanda du Preez  
Department: Visual Arts  
Degree: Magister Artium (Visual Studies)

This study considers the visual representation of the alchemical idea of the philosopher's stone (*lapis philosophorum*) in the *Harry Potter* films: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuaron 2004), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007). The *lapis philosophorum* was believed to turn base metals into gold and produce an Elixir of Life. As such, it is envisioned as the ultimate alchemical idea, and this study emphasises how the *lapis* can function as a signifier for an alchemical worldview within the *Harry Potter* films.

Because the concept and symbolism of the *Harry Potter* films is largely based on JK Rowling's (1997; 1998; 1999; 2000; 2003; 2005; 2007) original novels, this study provides a detailed comparison of how alchemical imagery is used in the novels and contrasts this with the visual imagery of the films. This study undertakes a hermeneutic analysis of the transmission of alchemical ideals from the literary to the visual medium. It also provides a detailed analysis of interrelated visual icons in the *Harry Potter* films that represent the idea of the *lapis* as an embodiment of alchemical perfection.

In addition, by studying the interplay between alchemical imagery in the *Harry Potter* novels and films, and comparing the worldviews represented by each, this study is able to analyse the dynamics of the hermeneutic process. This study concludes with a consideration of how alchemical theory relates to the discipline of hermeneutics, how it influences the process of interpretation, and ultimately the relationship between the alchemical worldview and current perspectives on authorship.

## KEY TERMS

Harry Potter; philosopher's stone; *lapis philosophorum*; alchemy; astrology; mythology; dying god; rebirth; resurrection; Messiah; serpent; dragon; winged sphere; phoenix; hermeneutics; authorship; Christian universalism; visual hybridisation.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .....	xix
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1. Background and aims of study .....	1
1.2. Theoretical framework, methodology and literature review .....	5
1.3. Outline of chapters .....	13
1.4. Conclusion .....	15
CHAPTER TWO: HARRY POTTER AND THE ALCHEMICAL QUEST .....	17
2.1. Introduction .....	17
2.2. Alchemical death and rebirth .....	21
2.3. Alchemy, metallurgy, and the creative fire .....	26
2.4. Alchemy and divine union .....	30
CHAPTER THREE: THE LABOUR OF ALCHEMY .....	39
3.1. Introduction .....	39
3.2. Alchemical <i>nigredo</i> .....	41
3.2.1 Death, destruction and the <i>prima materia</i> .....	41
3.2.2 Sirius Black and the <i>nigredo</i> .....	48
3.3. Alchemical <i>albedo</i> .....	52
3.4. Alchemical <i>rubedo</i> .....	55
CHAPTER FOUR: A SIGNIFICATION IN STONE .....	61
4.1. Introduction .....	61
4.2. Interpreting Rowling's alchemy .....	63
4.3. Alchemical imprints .....	69
4.3.1 The unity of the double serpent .....	72

4.3.2. The serpent and creation .....	77
4.3.3. The serpent and the alchemical soul .....	80
4.3.4. The serpent in the window .....	87
CHAPTER FIVE: THE SERPENT AND THE STONE .....	95
5.1. Introduction .....	95
5.2. Python and the polyjuice potion .....	98
5.3. The basilisk .....	104
CHAPTER SIX: ORBIS UNUM: THE STONE AS MESSIAH .....	111
6.1. Introduction .....	111
6.2. The winged sphere .....	115
6.3. The golden Snitch .....	120
CHAPTER SEVEN: ESOTERIC ALCHEMY .....	129
7.1. Introduction .....	129
7.2. Sirius Black and astrology .....	133
7.2.1 The <i>Leo-lapis</i> .....	134
7.3. The serpent and the candle .....	136
7.4. Conclusion .....	142
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE ALCHEMY OF AUTHORSHIP .....	145
8.1. Introduction .....	145
8.2. Alchemy and cosmology .....	148
8.3. Authorship and cosmology .....	150
8.4. The Phoenix-God .....	153
8.5. Influence, interpretation and disputation .....	154

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION .....	161
9.1. Summary of chapters .....	161
9.2. Contribution of study .....	163
9.3. Limitation of the study and suggestions for further research .....	164
9.4. In Conclusion .....	167
Sources Consulted .....	171





# CHAPTER I

## *Introduction*

### 1.1. Background and Aims of the Study

In her novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), the author JK Rowling introduces the audience to a fantasy world structured around the mysteries of alchemy. The title of the book is itself a reference to alchemy. The philosopher's stone is the much-desired goal of the alchemists and the most famous of alchemical ideas. It is reported to possess the power to perfect the imperfection in all things. Impure base metals are transformed to gold, while the imperfect, "fallen" man is illuminated and brought closer to God (Abraham 1998:145). Rowling (1997:161, 212) describes it as a small, blood-red stone that not only transmutes metals to gold, but also produces the Elixir of Life, which makes the drinker immortal.

To avoid any confusion between the actual philosopher's stone and the title of Rowling's first *Harry Potter* novel – *The Philosopher's Stone* – this study refers to the actual philosopher's stone by its Latin name: the *lapis philosophorum*, or *lapis* for short. This *lapis*, while not apparent to the reader at the onset of *The Philosopher's Stone*, is of extreme narrative importance. The evil Lord Voldemort, who is the antagonist and archenemy of Harry Potter, desperately seeks the *lapis* so that through it he may obtain the Elixir of Life. The Elixir is the means to his immortality and also his return to a physical body. It becomes the object of Voldemort's desire, and he acts through another to try and obtain it. Therefore the core of the narrative of *The Philosopher's Stone* is structured around Harry Potter familiarising himself with the idea that he is a boy wizard, learning to function in his new surroundings at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and finally becoming aware that the *lapis* is in fact hidden within the school grounds. This instigates a quest where Harry Potter, suspecting that the *lapis* is the target of a malicious school professor, chases after the small red stone in an attempt to

prevent it from falling into the wrong hands. At the end of the novel, Harry Potter succeeds in preventing Voldemort from obtaining the *lapis* and “returning to life”, in a manner of speaking. Evil is thwarted, but the school Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, decides that it is better if the *lapis* is destroyed in order to hinder any future return of Voldemort. The destruction of the *lapis* does not, however, mark the end of the alchemical symbolism within Rowling’s novels.

Often it has been assumed that the presence of the *lapis* in *The Philosopher’s Stone* can be explained as the product of creative mythic cross-referencing. Many of Rowling’s characters have mythological names, such as Parvati Patil, Minerva McGonagall, Dedalus Diggle and Hestia Jones. The mention of mythic creatures such as the unicorn, the phoenix and the hippogriff indicate the wide pool of symbolism from which Rowling draws. Hence the mention of alchemy and the *lapis* can be viewed as simply an addition to the already rich abundance of symbolic names and whimsical events. The idea of a stone that can turn any metal into gold seems like a fantastically magical idea, one worthy of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Subsequently the *lapis* becomes merely another object of fancy, and the full extent of its symbolism may be overlooked. For example, in *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter* (2003:19-22,95-98), the author David Colbert lucidly describes the origins of many of Rowling’s marvellous ideas. The topic of alchemy is covered, but restricted to about ten pages, dealing mostly with the general idea of the *lapis* as well as the historically contested alchemist Nicolas Flamel. This approach gives the idea that alchemy forms simply a subsidiary part of Rowling’s mythic forest.

This study, however, contends that alchemy forms more than just an intellectual anecdote within the *Harry Potter* novels. To date the only readily accessible analysis of Rowling’s alchemical symbolism has been undertaken by John Granger, who does an excellent job of explaining alchemical terms and principles to the general public. In his novel *Unlocking Harry Potter* (2007a), John Granger illustrates that alchemical symbolism is inherent to Rowling’s writing. Not only does it explain the presence of the mythic *lapis*, but it also clarifies the odd turns of plot, the names of many of the characters, and most importantly the symbolic structure of the novels. This alchemical symbolism is present throughout the entire *Harry Potter* series, and is not restricted to *The Philosopher’s Stone*. Similarly, this study addresses the alchemical symbolism found in all of the *Harry Potter* texts, and does not restrict its analyses to the first novel. It may not seem that apparent, considering that alchemy is hardly ever mentioned throughout the remainder of the novels, yet alchemical symbolism is so deeply entrenched within the foundations of Rowling’s fantasy world that once the reader is taught how to interpret alchemical symbols, he or she can find them with ease.

This study shares John Granger's view that alchemy is a primary symbolic metaphor through which the *Harry Potter* texts should be accessed. Chapters Two and Three aim to describe the broader tenets of alchemy and to explain how these ideas are represented in the *Harry Potter* novels and films. It is proposed that alchemy is not merely a pervasive metaphor, but that it becomes *the* metaphor *qua* metaphor. The *lapis* is a complex symbol of extraordinary depth and breadth. It is mentioned under different names in many cultures, both ancient and modern. On a primary level the *lapis* is a small red stone capable of performing astonishing feats, just as described by Rowling (1997:161,212). However, it is also the pinnacle of alchemical perfection, in a sense the end of the alchemist's quest. The *lapis* becomes the accomplishment of the alchemical worldview. It embodies particular cultural beliefs, hopes and aspirations. Such ideologies are represented when Rowling employs the *lapis* as a symbolic element. Rowling herself has expressed her romanticised desire to be an alchemist (Simpson 1998:[sp]), so the clearest way of deciphering what the *Harry Potter* texts connote is to decipher the *lapis*.

This is no easy task, however. Alchemists always refer to the *lapis* in a paradoxical, enigmatic way. It is called a stone, but not a stone; it is said to lie hidden, secretly lurking in unexpected places, yet it is to be found at all times, in every place and about every man. Furthermore the alchemists realised that the *lapis* was more than just a physical compound, it was also a spiritual reality (Abraham 1998:145,147). Most importantly, the symbolism of the *lapis* is never stagnant. It may remain a small, blood-red stone in popular depictions, but it is also an archetypal signifier of change and transmutation, of unity and harmony. At some level, mythic images like the phoenix, the serpent, and the lion all point to the *lapis*. Yet the *lapis* itself is a signifier for a higher order of meaning. Most notably, mediaeval Latin authors paralleled the *lapis* with the Christ (Jung 1993:353,357), whose death and resurrection herald the purification of fallen man. John Granger (2006:39), who has been dubbed the "Christian apologist" to Rowling's novels, informs readers that alchemical imagery is useful because it helps them connect spiritually with the promise of a life in Christ. Rowling has publicly stated that her novels deal with Christian themes (Adler 2007:[sp]), so John Granger (2007a:53) is perhaps justified in viewing Rowling's *lapis* as a "Christological" symbol.

Clearly the *lapis* is an important sign within any hermeneutic analysis for it crosses the threshold between signified and signifier. Alchemy is concerned with perpetual transformation, thus an examination of the *lapis* may reveal a great deal about the construction and interpretations of archetypal signs. Such an analysis should not be restricted to Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels. The *Harry Potter* films (*The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001), *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuaron 2004), *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), and *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007)) are built upon Rowling's alchemical foundations. As such many of the alchemical symbols that Rowling uses are



reinterpreted for the visual medium. In many instances Rowling's descriptions are rather literally and faithfully converted to a visual form, for example the physical red *lapis* at the end of *The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001). There are instances, however, where the *Harry Potter* films add supplementary alchemical images. These images are not described in Rowling's novels and illustrate an additional understanding on the part of the filmmakers; they not only support the novels, but in many cases enhance them.

Chapters Four through Seven examine a few of these visual elements and undertake an extensive decryption of their possible symbolism. The specific symbols cited in these chapters are all reminiscent of the *lapis*, even if they do not look like small red stones. It is, furthermore, the aim of this study to interpret whether or not the alchemical interpretation of the *Harry Potter* films and the placement of supplementary symbols is the same as that of Rowling. Is the *lapis* of the *Harry Potter* films the same as the *lapis* of Rowling; do they signify the same ideology?

Because this study is a comparison of visual and verbal symbols, it forms a bridge between traditional English literature studies and visual cultural studies. It is hoped that a study of the relationship between the written and visual texts may aid in garnering a clearer understanding of the hermeneutic process. Just as the *lapis* symbolises the change from one metal to another, so it may come to symbolise the transition from the written to the visual art form. An analysis of such a strong archetype and its contemporary reception reveals why the response to the *Harry Potter* story has been so overwhelming, whether positive or negative. Additionally the relationship between source and text raises many philosophical questions relating to the nature of the authorship process and its affiliation to cultural symbols. The interpretative and authorial processes themselves may be compared to the metaphysical paradigms of alchemy. In essence, the transmutation of the *lapis* is the transmutation of meaning, and the author and the alchemist occupy a similar signification. This relationship is discussed in detail in Chapter Eight, which closes the consideration of the hermeneutic implications of the *lapis* as portrayed in the *Harry Potter* films.

In summary then, the chief aims of this study are threefold:

1. To provide an overview of alchemical theory and illustrate how this symbolism is used in the *Harry Potter* novels and films.
2. To undertake a detailed analysis of specific visual elements in the *Harry Potter* films that are ancillary to Rowling's novels, hereby interpreting the relationship of meaning between the written and visual texts, and

3. To discuss the implications of a hermeneutic reading of the *lapis* for the discussion of authorship and the construction of meaning.

## 1.2. Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Literature Review.

As the primary focus of this study is the *lapis*, understandably a significant portion of the interpretation of symbols is derived from historical alchemical writings. Alchemical writings, however, have spanned many centuries and it is impossible within the scope of this study to address all of the diverse texts that have been penned. This endeavour is complicated by the fact that alchemical writings from different eras, and even from different authors within the same era, do not necessarily agree and can have vastly divergent symbolism and laboratory procedures. The prevailing attitude to the craft of alchemy is far from homogeneous. In 1934 Arthur John Hopkins (1934:3-4) stated that a comprehensive explanation of alchemy, able to coordinate and unify the whole, was still lacking. Current scholarship is more concerned with the diversity of alchemy, the multiplicity of its definitions, and the malleability of its theory and practice. Alchemy is now interpreted as a pluralistic rather than a singular endeavour, as “alchemies” rather than a grand “alchemy” (Linden 2003:4).

This contemporary academic attitude could place a study such as this into a potential quandary. It becomes difficult to interpret the meaning of a set of symbols when such meaning is potentially limitless. Hence, for the purposes of this study, alchemical theory is reduced to its basic principles in order to evaluate its underlying symbology and worldview. This entails that rather than focusing on the differences between icons and laboratory procedures throughout the history of alchemy, this study concerns itself with a general, mythological appraisal of what alchemy tries to accomplish.

The basic principles of alchemy include such notions as the death and rebirth of metals, and the union of male and female “elements” into an androgynous whole. Such archetypal themes are not to be found exclusively in alchemy. They can be traced throughout world mythology. The concept of death and rebirth, for example, is embodied in a number of ancient deities, such as Adonis, Tammuz, Odin, and Osiris. This study correlates the alchemical notions of death and rebirth with the mythic principles embodied by these “dying gods” or “resurrection deities”, who often (but not exclusively) represented the death and rebirth of the crop in agricultural societies. Such a perspective reiterates the vast network of mythological symbols that Rowling employs, and helps to establish a view of alchemy that is not liturgically bound to a specific cultural or religious phenomenon. It is easier to explain the complexities of alchemy within such a general framework, however it is also understood that this perspective is ultimately limited.

Certain alchemical ideas are sidelined while others are brought to the fore, and as problematic as this is from an academic perspective it allows for historical alchemy to be reduced to a manageable topic for the scope of study such as this.

The largest criticism to be levelled against such an approach to both mythology and alchemy is that it is ultimately reductive. Yet while it is possible to describe common thematic elements between various mythological deities, this study does not attempt to argue that all of the so-called “resurrection deities” carry the exact same signification. This is a particularly important point with regards to how the *Harry Potter* texts should be interpreted. While there are instances where the mythic and alchemical symbolism in the *Harry Potter* texts point to archetypal notions of death and rebirth, not every incident is necessarily equatable with, for example, an Orthodox Christian understanding of the resurrection of the Christ. Nor does the fact that this study intermittently mentions a number of mythic dying gods such as Odin or Osiris imply that this study assumes all of these deities (or their representative religions) to signify the same ideology.

While the symbolism of dying gods is important to any holistic understanding of alchemy, its study may be interpreted as part of a structuralist agenda: one that forces a synchronic interpretation (Malbon 1983:219) of world mythology and theology. The result is a perception that this study displays the relativisation of modern thought, making “no distinction between traditional and modern or between religious and nonreligious” (Homans 1975:338). In essence there is the criticism that such a perspective recontextualises theology and mythology, creating “secular mythologies which [embody] a doctrine of man composed of images of his essence, his alienation, and his salvation” (Homans 1975:330-331). Again, such a theoretical approach is seen to be ideologically biased, moulding potential symbolic circumstances to its own, perceived, secular agenda.

Understandably, Christian academics like John Granger take exception to such a universal approach, arguing that the symbolism in the *Harry Potter* novels is predominantly Christian. Hence the manifestation of alchemical principles such as death and rebirth should be interpreted as a metaphor for the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and not as a generalised mythic principle that could include any number of secular symbols or Pagan “dying gods”. He argues that any attempt to interpret the *Harry Potter* texts as a manifestation of a general mythological principle, such as that of the dying god; or to interpret the protagonist Harry Potter as yet another example of the “monomyth” (*cf.* Campbell 1993:3-46) of the cultural hero, sidelines Rowling’s ideological intentions. According to John Granger (2007b:[sp]), the symbols that



Rowling uses declare her Christian faith, and should be interpreted within that context.<sup>1</sup> A general mythological reading, which insinuates that the *Harry Potter* novels are simply another example of universal archetypal themes, indicates an “atheist agenda” (Granger 2007b:[sp]) that reinterprets the given symbols according to its own worldview and purposefully refuses to accept the particularly Christian nature of Rowling’s text.

To linger too long on this topic may be seen as a defacement of Christian apologetics for the *Harry Potter* novels, and this study has no desire to invoke its research as anti-Christian when it reduces alchemical theory to universal mythological ideals. However, since this active reduction is a moot point of academic and theological criticism, it is impossible to discuss the theoretical framework of this study without at least a brief defence for what some may argue to be an erroneous position.

Christian apologists for the *Harry Potter* novels are quick to indicate that “the category of dying and rising gods, once a major topic of scholarly investigation, must now be understood to have been largely a misnomer...” (*Behold a phoenix* 2007:[sp]). As such, the secular agenda of universalism is sidelined, because its foundational mytheme is negated. The argument is based on academic criticism of foundational work in the field of anthropology and sociology undertaken by the influential Sir James Frazer (2003).<sup>2</sup> Most notably, Frazer popularised the concept of dying gods in antiquity, analysing the “savage roots of religion and the relation of sacrificial kingship to seasonal rituals” (Craig, in Frazer 2003:viii) in his seminal work: *The Golden Bough* (first published in 1890). Academics in the fields of comparative religion as well as anthropology and sociology have dismissed large portions of his work (*cf.* Ackerman 1975; Smith 1973) for its assumptions and its subjective interpretation of the evidence. Subsequently, Christian academics of Harry Potter are quick to indicate that the topic of dying gods is the foundation for a fallacious theoretical framework: “Pagan nonbelief in the resurrection shows the folly of the concept of ‘dying-rising’ gods” (*Behold a phoenix* 2007:[sp]). This perspective is, unfortunately, just as reductionist as the one which assumes that a pattern of dying gods

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<sup>1</sup> The perspective is not quite as simple as stating that that all symbols in the *Harry Potter* novels must be interpreted exclusively as Christian symbols. As John Granger (2007/11/13) explains, Rowling is not an evangelist but a Christian artist who draws from the English literary tradition. This tradition, according to Granger, is an almost exclusively Christian tradition. Accordingly “her message... is not an overt and explicit invitation to Christ but an implicitly Christian answer to the questions and concerns that consume us as postmoderns”. Subsequently the novels remain “ideologically open”, and the Christian symbols may arise because it is the language of her literary tradition rather than an exclusive, personal faith commitment.

<sup>2</sup> James Frazer’s work is not the only study to highlight the similarities between world religions or to emphasise the idea of a god that is mutilated and killed. These themes recur, for example, in the works of Karen Armstrong (2005), Joseph Campbell (1974, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c, 1993), and Robert Graves (1999). This study has not directly cited all of the mythological sources that have informed its analysis of alchemy. They are, however, listed under the list of *Sources Consulted* at the end of this study.

exists. The problematic assumption is that a non-belief in bodily resurrection announces the abolition of the category of “dying gods”.

In reality, the concept of the dying and rising god is ultimately linked to an understanding of the interrelationship of life and death and of the balance between procreation and destruction. While there are fundamental differences between the Christian interpretation of the resurrection and particular “Pagan” ideals of rebirth, the difference does not negate the fact that deities illustrating the characteristic narratives of death and rebirth are found throughout world mythology. Neither does it negate the fact that a synchronic or diachronic analysis of such relationships can be engaged in.

As far as this study is concerned, the mention of a dying god is not undertaken to further an “atheist agenda” (Granger 2007b:[sp]), nor is it intended to undermine a Christian interpretation of the *Harry Potter* novels. The concept of the dying god is invoked because it links to the idea of fecundity and *rebirth*, not necessarily as an alternate form of *resurrection*. While the two ideas are co-substantial, they are not always identical. The universality of the mytheme of the dying god is the ideal framework within which to dissect the universal ideals of alchemy. Chapters Four through Seven of this study present evidence to support an alchemical reading of the *Harry Potter* films that is to some degree universal. This study accepts that Rowling’s Christian ideology has influenced her choice of symbols but also questions an interpretation that is exclusively Christian and ignores the presence of more universal symbols, symbols that exist outside of traditional Christian iconography.

Subsequently the alchemical symbolism discussed in this study becomes more universal, accepting that alchemy has been a cross-cultural endeavour, while nevertheless anticipating its European, Christian manifestation. In contrast, John Granger (2007b:[sp]) argues that the alchemy in *Harry Potter* is a purely Christian alchemy, and that it should not be confused with Gnostic, “New Age” mystical, or psychological interpretations of alchemy such as those of Carl Jung (1983, 1993). According to Granger (2007a:50), Jung’s “psychological understanding of alchemy and position that the alchemists were ‘Gnostics’ is a case of historical projection of one’s own empiricist and anti-religious beliefs into the past”. It is, however, idealistic to assume that the alchemy that existed in Latin Europe was a purely Christian phenomenon, or that the historical origins of alchemy are bound to Christian ideology. In spite of Martin Luther’s laudations that alchemy is a fine allegory for the Christian resurrection (Granger 2007a:53; Linden 2003:22), the historical and political reception of alchemy, even within Christian Europe and England, has been complex. This is illustrated under the discussion of authors such as Mendelsohn (1992:33-34), Newman (1989:437-438) and Schuler (1980:294,299,303). European alchemy, irrespective of its Christian allegory, has been highly syncretic (Schuler 1980:299),

incorporating aspects of Stoicism, Platonism and Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, as well as Greek, Roman and Egyptian mythology. At the same time European alchemy strove to retain the influence of the Graeco-Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus, the purported “father” of alchemy (Fowden 1993:22,90,123; Grafton 1983:81-82; Gill 1984:223; Linden 2003:11). Subsequently this study agrees with Carl Jung (1993:357) that “when we come to the original basic ideas of alchemy we find elements that derive from Pagan, and more particularly from Gnostic sources”. Such influences are *not* omitted from the *Harry Potter* films. They form a leitmotif along with Rowling’s Christian symbolism, and they are highlighted throughout this study.

The history of alchemy is an extensive topic and one which has informed the perspective of this study. The primary aim of this study, however, remains to analyse and explain the significance of the *lapis* in the *Harry Potter* films. It becomes tedious to burden the reader with academic speculations on the history and reception of alchemy itself. As such a number of texts dealing with Hermeticism and the history of Graeco-Egyptian, Indian and Chinese alchemy<sup>3</sup> are not comprehensively cited within this study. These texts have influenced the perspective of this study to a greater or lesser extent and as such they need to be mentioned. Similarly there are a number of primary and secondary alchemical texts<sup>4</sup> that have informed this study, but are again not cited extensively within the body of this study due to its limitations. This study has focused predominantly on the alchemical research of Lyndy Abraham (1998), Mercia Eliade (1978) and MM Pattison Muir (2004 *cf.* 1913b) in the construction of its alchemical paradigm, as their arguments are lucid and universal enough to facilitate a concise description of alchemical theory. The writings attributed to the French alchemist Nicholas Flamel are also of particular significance to this study. He is mentioned by Rowling in *The Philosopher’s Stone* (1997:161) and the symbolism of his alchemical writing is pertinent to an understanding of many of the visual alchemical symbols employed in the *Harry Potter* films.

This study approaches all of these sources, as well as its critical analyses, from within a broader framework of hermeneutic discourse. The link between alchemy and hermeneutics ought to be a

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<sup>3</sup> Full references for these sources are given under the section “Sources Consulted” at the end of this study. They include: Clough 1933; Cumont 1918; Davis 1936a, 1936b, 1938; Dubs 1947; Everard 1650; Fowden 1993; Gill 2002; Grafton 1983; Granger 1904; Griffith 1904; Hagen 1877; Harkenss 1996; Herodotus 440 BCE; Hough 1977; Hopkins 1918, 1925, 1934; Kedzie 1891; Kingsley 1993; Lévi 2001; Linden 2003; Mahé 1996; Marks 1966; Marshall 2002; Martin 1942; Mead 1906; Mendelsohn 1992; Pereira 1999; Pike 1871; Plessner 1945a, 1945b; Quespel 1992; Read 1933; Ruelle 1908; Schuler 1980; Sheppard 1980; and Spurr 1988.

<sup>4</sup> *cf.* Avicenna 2003; Bacon 2003; Bernard, Earl of Trevisan 2003; Brenner 1997; Browne 1920; Delphinus [sa]; De Toraeke [sa]; *Dialogue of Cleopatra* 2003; Fludd 2003; French 2003; Hayyan & Pseudo-Gerber 2003; Hortalanus [sa]; Kelly [sa]; *Leyden Papyrus* 2003; Magnus 2003; Maier 1617; McLean [sa]; Merton [sa]; Pernety 2006; Philalethes [sa]; Pseudo-Democritus 2003; Ripley 2003; Sendivogius 2003a, 2003b; Stephanos of Alexandria 2003; Synesius 1678; *The Only True Way* 1677; *The Poem of the Philosopher Theophrastus* 2003; *The Sophic Hydrolith* 1678; Waite 1893; Yazid 2003.

more or less clear path, particularly in light of creative etymology. While the Greek deity Hermes is neither the etymological nor conceptual origin of the Greek *hermeneutikos* (hermeneutics), both words do share a common linguistic root: *hermeneuein* (Knapp & Michaels 1987:52; Malbon 1983:212). As Elizabeth Struthers Malbon (1983:212) explains, the root word conveys three basic meanings: 1. to speak, 2. to explain or interpret, and 3. to translate. Similarly Hermes, the Greek messenger of the gods, was also regarded as the eloquent revelation of the art of writing and discourse. Being such a potent signifier he would invariably have become attached to the nuances of hermeneutics via a pseudo-etymology (Birus 1987:73). Subsequently hermeneutics becomes the art of Hermes or, in the words of Malbon (1983:212), the “Hermes process”.

Later, upon his syncretic assimilation with the Egyptian deity Thoth, Hermes was to be reconceived as the powerful and influential Hermes Trismegistus, the sage of Hermeticism.<sup>5</sup> No longer was he merely an interpreter and scribe, he also became a god of magic, medicine and time. The Stoics had already assigned Hermes to the role of *logos* and demiurge within their theology (Fowden 1993:24). Subsequently it is not hard to imagine that the newly formed, Graeco-Egyptian Hermes would become a cosmic deity presiding over fate and justice, creation, the afterlife, and the revelation of the divine will. As Hermes Trismegistus, the god of interpretation came to be seen as the very patron of the alchemical arts. As the mystical *Mercurius*, Hermes evolved from a god of discourse to the central symbol of the alchemical work.

Subsequently Hermes, as icon, is indispensable to the signification of alchemy. The Latin *Mercurius* has become the universal agent of alchemical transformation. Being the central symbol of alchemy, he highlights its cyclical nature. According to Lyndy Abraham (1998:125), *Mercurius* is “present everywhere and at all times” during the alchemical work. Not only is he the symbol of its desolate, chthonic beginnings, he is also the goal of the alchemical work: the *lapis philosophorum*. Subsequently, *Mercurius* is the “goal of his own transformation”. He is “not only the matter of the work but stands for all of the processes to which the [alchemical matter] is subjected”. As Abraham (1998:125) concludes, “He is simultaneously the matter of the work, the process of the work, and the agent by which all this is effected”.

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<sup>5</sup> The Greek Hermes and Graeco-Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus are such archetypal signs that it is impossible to do any justice to the full extent of their signification in this brief space. Mythologically and alchemically they represent the entirety of alchemical thought: from its base assumptions through to its dialectic practice. The cultural and theological significance of Hermes Trismegistus is described in detail by such authors as Copenhaver (1995), French (2003), Fowden (1993), Granger (1904), Mead (1906), and Quespel (1992). Similarly, Derrida’s (2004) *Dissemination* covers the deconstructive significance and philosophical impact of the Egyptian Thoth.

It is difficult to resist a comparison between the circular signification of *Mercurius* and the notion of the hermeneutic circle: the theoretical assumption that circularity is an inevitable part of the interpretative process. Via this notion, the signification of a text is argued to be pieced together in conformance with a pre-existing thesis for which no external test is available (Martin 1972:100-101). Because the parts and the whole are mutually determinate, the thinking is inherently circumscribed by its own hypothesis. Hermes, however, speaks not only of the circular nature of hermeneutic interpretation. The European alchemical discipline eventually “came to include every classical myth, every ancient fable and every conceivable allegorical figure, emblem, symbol – or ‘hieroglyph’ – in a system of multiple correspondences” (Klossowski de Rola 1997:17). Subsequently, its chain of signification is held within a similar loop of contiguous meaning, beautifully expressed through the volatile *Mercurius*. Alchemical symbols refer to one another in a maddening cycle of cross-references, while identical symbols shift meaning depending on the context of their use and the other symbols in their proximity.

Such multiple correspondences and circular signification lead to a methodological problem: how to present a discourse that is based on the interpretation of circular reasoning. It is for this reason that this study may from time to time appear simultaneously complex and redundant in its discussion of the signification of the *lapis*. In the world of mythological hermeneutics, symbols and topics flow into and out of one another in an ever-increasing arc of signification. As a result, certain symbols need to be discussed multiple times, but in varying contexts, so that all the mythemes embedded within the symbol can be fully elaborated upon. As a result, the theoretical approach inherent to this study is an interpretation of the migration of meaning (Wittkower 1939:293) rather than an implicit declaration that a signifier and signified have a set cultural connotation. This hints toward a fluid sign, built upon a similar cultural mythology to the type that Roland Barthes (1992b) proposes in *Myth Today*. Chapters Four through Seven discuss the hermeneutic implications of alchemical idioms that have a multiplicity of meanings. Concomitantly, the interpretations of this study seek not to impose rigidity, but rather to evaluate the possible metaphysical ramifications of an inter-related group of visual signs that *hybridise* with one another in the construction of meaning. This phenomenon is coined “visual hybridisation” and explains how seemingly unrelated signs (like the serpent, the lion and the phoenix in the *Harry Potter* films) may all point to an archetypal image such as the *lapis*, and in so doing extend their significations toward a theoretical “ultimate signified”. It is the aim of this symbolic reading to “identify what the work represses or illuminates” (Culler 2001:xvii) by analysing its contextual locus (Wittkower 1939:293), through a theoretical awareness of the greater hermeneutic discourse within which the visual analysis takes place.



By applying such theoretical paradigms to a reading of the *lapis* a method of research arises which analyses it as a dynamic signifier, one that can change between readings, between readers, between cultures and even through the ravages of time. The hermeneutic analysis thus comes to fully include the domains of reception and authorship theory. Authorship addresses the ideas of creativity and origin, of agency and free will, of cultural identity, and of ownership and authority, to name but a few (Burke 1995:xv-xvi). It begins to ask whether the signification of the *lapis* is a cultural anomaly or indebted to the ingenuity of the author; whether its meaning is a transcendental fixation or dependent upon its reception by the “contemporary reader”<sup>6</sup> of *Harry Potter*? Authorship continues to be an avenue of intense speculation precisely because it affects both writer (or filmmaker) and reader, their relationship to one another, to the created work, and to the cosmos and the transcendent. According to Nietzsche (qtd. in Bloom 2005:26), “all our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary upon an unknown text, one that is perhaps unknowable but still felt”. The signification of the *lapis* reveals how this “unknown text” of Nietzsche plays: upon the fields of imminence and transcendence, upon the imagination of the individual author and the academic interpreter. The stone of immortality becomes the immortal signifier.

While the hermeneutic foundation used in this study is indebted to numerous authors,<sup>7</sup> particular focus has been given to the work of Seán Burke (1998), which critiques the structuralist and deconstructive positions on authorship. Burke (1995:xv) claims that “Authorship, like cosmology, remains a source of fascination for believers and non-believers alike since the issues which it raises reflect any given society’s sense of being in the world, and construction of itself in relation to discourse, knowledge and tradition” His work tackles the theological assumptions of authorship – its relationship to transcendence and imminence – within the works of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida and provides a thorough foundation in understanding the relationship between alchemy and authorship. Such philosophical arguments form a perfect extension to the interpretation of the *lapis* and conclude the theoretical paradigms that this study employs.

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<sup>6</sup> The term “contemporary reader” is a problematic blanket term for a number of reasons. To reject the reader is a potential idealisation. To assume a “normalised” heterosexual male reader is presumptive. How does a researcher know what the reader is supposed to know or accept? Jonathan Culler (2001:xxi) raises these questions in *The Pursuit of Signs*. He answers them by claiming that, “No one is *the reader*, certainly; texts have readers, who are as different as people who read. But a text posits a reader. And we need to return to that important fact if we are to understand the operation of texts”. “There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004:8).

<sup>7</sup> cf. Anderson 200; Artaud 1958; Bahti & Szondi 1978; Birus 1987; Bloom 2005; Brooks 2003; Brooks 1982; Brown & Buck 1980; Demaitre 1972; Eagleton 2005, 2006; Eco 1981; Foucault 2001; Griswold 1993; Hamilton & Schneider 2002; Handler & Lid 1975; Harker 1992, 1998; Homans 1975; Iampolski 1998; Johnson 1988; Knapp & Michaels 1987; Malbon 1883; Martin 1972; Nuyen 1994; Ravoux 1979; Regis 1976; Schmidt 2006; Sullivan 1995; Thompson 1993; Wilson 1981; Wortzel 2003.

### 1.3. Outline of Chapters

In Chapter One the primary aims of this study are mentioned. In brief, these are to provide an overview of alchemical theory and illustrate how such symbolism is apparent in the *Harry Potter* novels and films. In addition, this study undertakes a detailed analysis of the representation of alchemy within the *Harry Potter* films, particularly as it is embodied in the mystical idea of the *lapis*. Such interpretations are then extended to a discussion about the significance of the *lapis* in understanding the process of the construction and interpretation of meaning. Chapter One also explains the theoretical framework of this study, considering alternate approaches to the topic but ultimately justifying its universal approach.

Chapter Two of this study provides an overview of alchemical theory, its ideological assumptions and its idiomatic language. It explains the relevance and importance of the alchemical worldview to the construction of meaning within the *Harry Potter* novels and films by focusing on the universal mythological concepts of death and rebirth, androgyny and harmony. In order to explain the genesis of these concepts, the chapter considers the metallurgical origins of alchemy, and how these combine with the common mythologies of agricultural societies to create a worldview that regards metals as a living product, subject to the same cycles of fecundity, growth and degradation as agricultural crops.

After presenting this broad conceptual framework, Chapter Three elaborates upon the alchemical theory by explaining the main stages of the *opus alchymicum*, or alchemical work. The symbolism of these various stages is pertinent to understanding the narrative and symbolic direction of the *Harry Potter* series. Chapter Three highlights how the three fundamental stages of alchemy: the *nigredo* (black phase), the *albedo* (white phase) and the *rubedo* (red phase) are continually referenced within the *Harry Potter* novels and films.

Chapter Four commences discussion on the signification of the *lapis philosophorum* by considering how the author, JK Rowling, views alchemy. The chapter considers the *lapis* as a signifier for a universal perspective on alchemical practice, as opposed to a purely Orthodox Christian interpretation of the alchemical narrative. By contrasting how Rowling's novels and the *Harry Potter* films interpret and treat the signification of the *lapis*, the chapter illustrates a degree of symbolic interdependence. Not only does the chapter illustrate that the films are aware of the greater alchemical narrative, but that they have also added their own supplementary symbolism and signification.

Chapter Five elaborates upon the visual alchemical symbols introduced in the previous chapter. The chapter details the relationship between the recurrent image of the serpent and the signification of the *lapis* by focusing on the mystical figure of *Mercurius* within alchemical symbolism. Chapter Five highlights the multiplicity and complexities held within the archetypal serpent image. These complexities extend to the signification of the *lapis philosophorum* and an understanding of the heroic destiny of Harry Potter.

Developing from here, Chapter Six augments these arguments by highlighting the relationship between the *lapis* and another pervasive visual symbol: the sphere. As elementary as the symbol may appear, its syntagmatic relationship with the *lapis* reveals multiple levels of signification. The relationship unveils the totality of the dimensions of the alchemical symbolism within the *Harry Potter* films. This argumentation extends the *lapis* from being a mere signifier of “immortality” to becoming a transcendental ideal: a symbol of God, creation, and man redeemed. This chapter also focuses upon the *lapis* as a Messianic signifier, highlighting the relationship between Harry Potter, as heroic protagonist, and the *lapis* as the embodiment of Messianic destiny.

Utilising the critical framework of the previous chapters, Chapter Seven posits a potential interpretation of the *lapis* in the *Harry Potter* texts as an esoteric signifier, relating to cosmology and individual destiny. The chapter extends the relationship between Harry Potter and the *lapis*, as a Messianic signifier, by revealing the astrological destiny that the *Harry Potter* texts place upon their protagonist.

Chapter Eight brings together all of the symbolic analyses of the previous chapters in order to reveal the full hermeneutic implications of a reading of the *lapis philosophorum*. The chapter discusses the interrelated conceptual frameworks of alchemy and authorship, detailing how both have asked similar fundamental questions relating to creativity and the relationship between man, God and Creation. Both alchemy and authorship touch upon aspects of the transcendent and the immanent, and these are questions that are mirrored in the heroic quest and destiny of Harry Potter and the relationship between this protagonist and his creator, JK Rowling.

Finally, Chapter Nine concludes the discussions of this study, presenting a summary of the dialogue of the previous chapters. Chapter Nine also discusses the contribution of the study to the general discourse of academic Visual Studies while highlighting the limitations of this approach. The chapter concludes with suggestions for supplementary research.

#### 1.4. Conclusion

While it is impossible for a study of this scope to attempt a complete evaluation of centuries of alchemy and the quest for immortality, there is at least a hope that its elementary symbolism can be presented to a contemporary academic audience interested in the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Any form of criticism is in danger of blinding itself to the carapace of the methodology that it employs and to the ideological premise of its hypothesis. This study does not claim any exemption from such shortcomings. However, in the interests of providing a clear thread or focal point within the study, the methodological and theoretical frameworks employed have been chosen in an attempt to best illustrate the depth of the symbolism of the *lapis*. Perhaps an extensive decryption of this mythic symbol and its position within the *Harry Potter* films will facilitate a deeper, critical understanding of hermeneutic interpretation and reawaken academic interest in the impact of alchemical theory on contemporary academics.

It is with such goals in mind that the next chapter introduces the reader to the basic tenets of alchemy. This overview of alchemy and the quest for the *lapis* establishes the foundation for all subsequent discourse surrounding symbolism, interpretation and reception.



## CHAPTER 2

### *Harry Potter and the Alchemical Quest*

#### 2.1. Introduction

JK Rowling has named the first novel in her *Harry Potter* series *The Philosopher's Stone*. Clearly the stone, or *lapis*, is an important symbol within the series. Not only does it instigate the major plot of the first *Harry Potter* novel, but the *lapis* also sets the symbolic precedent for all of the future novels, ending with the triumphant conclusion of *The Deathly Hallows* (2007). The *lapis* announces that Harry Potter's journey is one through the symbolic world of alchemy. As Rowling (1997:161) writes, "the ancient study of alchemy is concerned with making the Philosopher's Stone". The *lapis* is the "arcanum of all arcana" (Abraham 1998:145); it is the assimilation of alchemical practice, hope and desire. From a hermeneutic perspective the *lapis* can be imagined as the supreme sign of alchemy. Because it is the ultimate perfection and culmination of alchemical lore it stands as a unifying sign (De Saussure 1998:300). It refers not only to its own nature as a "blood-red stone", or "a legendary substance with astonishing powers" (Rowling 1997:161,212); it also refers to the culmination of the entire alchemical mythology that has conferred upon it these extraordinary powers.

The significance of the *lapis* and alchemy to the world of *Harry Potter* is the primary topic of this chapter. While alchemy may be a notoriously difficult topic to undertake, it is essential to a fuller understanding of Rowling's novels. In an interview with Anne Simpson (1998:[sp]), JK Rowling stated, "I've never wanted to be a witch, but an alchemist, now that's a different matter. To invent this wizard world, I've learned a ridiculous amount about alchemy... in order to set the parameters and establish the stories' internal logic". It is thus alchemy that sets the symbolic framework for all of Rowling's novels. Alchemy is not restricted to the first novel: *The Philosopher's Stone*. While the physical *lapis* is destroyed at the end of *The Philosopher's*



*Stone*, its alchemical symbolism is maintained throughout the subsequent novels. If alchemy has set the parameters for Rowling's magical world, then it is to be expected that her novels, and subsequently the films based upon these novels, are littered with such alchemical references. It is important to understand this foundation since many of her mythological signifiers can offer several dimensions of associated meaning because of their cultural volatility (De Saussure 1998:300; Barthes 1992b:688; 1998:312). These ancillary meanings add to the rich symbolic tapestry, but the meaning may be skewed if the alchemical context is ignored. To this end the current chapter endeavours to explain the alchemical philosophy upon which much of Rowling's symbolism is based.

It is often understood that alchemy is an antiquated art, practiced in medieval basements, that focused on the production of pure gold from base metals and on the production of an elixir of immortality, also known as the "Elixir of Life" (Schwarz 1980:57). There are other ways of approaching and interpreting alchemy, but for the time being this understanding will be explored. In *The Philosopher's Stone*, JK Rowling (1997:161) informs the reader, and her "lay" audience of Hermione Granger, Ronald Weasley and Harry Potter, what the *lapis* is through a cleverly placed library book. The author of the book writes that the "Stone will transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal". This description is sufficient to explain the narrative motivation of the novel, and any reader unfamiliar with alchemy quickly understands that the key theme of the *lapis*, as it pertains to the novel, is immortality.

This is important because, as Rowling has reiterated, death is a pervasive and important theme throughout the *Harry Potter* novels (Richard and Judy 2006). An "Elixir of Life" becomes a strong symbol in a narrative surrounded by so much death. To some, physical immortality may be seen as a means of conquering death. Lord Voldemort, who is Rowling's symbolic epitome of evil in the *Harry Potter* novels, informs his followers that "I... have gone further than anybody along the path that leads to immortality. You know my goal – to conquer death" (Rowling 2000:566). He is acutely aware that the *lapis* may aid him in his goal, but to his dismay his attempts to procure it are thwarted at the end of *The Philosopher's Stone* and he must wait a few more years before he is able to return to a physical body and continue his quest for immortality. "I did not manage to steal the Philosopher's Stone. I was not to be assured an immortal life," he tells his followers (Rowling 2000:567).

Voldemort's comments confirm his character. Rowling has constructed him not only as an archetype of death, but also as an instruction in the fear of death. His name is derived from the French phrase "*vol de mort*", which translates into English as "fly from death" (Colbert 2003:249) or "flight from death". In *The Order of the Phoenix* he reveals this fear. "There is

nothing worse than death”, he snarls at Dumbledore (Rowling 2003:718). Voldemort wishes to conquer death, not by relinquishing his fear of it, but rather by preventing it from ever happening. His motives are ultimately selfish, and he has no difficulty killing other people in order to achieve his own immortality. This is revealed in *The Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling 2005:465), where it is explained that Voldemort murders individuals in order to split his soul. “Killing rips the soul apart”, Professor Slughorn tells him. Voldemort uses these acts of murder to fragment his soul. The fragments he then encases in a magically enchanted item called a Horcrux. As Slughorn explains, “Even if one’s body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged. But, of course, existence in such a form... few would want it... Death would be preferable” (Rowling 2005:464-465).

It is disturbing but insightful that such a character would be drawn to the *lapis*. Voldemort’s quest for the *lapis* is an expression of his selfish nature, just as the history of alchemy is littered with stories of greedy charlatans who have sullied the “glorious Art” of alchemy (*The Only True Way* 1893 cf. 1678:[sp]) by faking the manufacture of gold. While it is a demeaning view, it is necessary to consider occurrences where alchemy was simply a selfish, materialistic quest. Voldemort, above all, reminds the reader of the *lapis*’ ability to stir the baser desires of humanity. The satiation of materialistic needs – wealth and a never-ending life in which to enjoy it – is an ideological spectre that has always followed the art of alchemy (Muir 2004b cf. 1913:[sp]). This is why Dumbledore cordially instructs Harry Potter that “the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all – the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things which are worst for them” (Rowling 1997:215).

To Dumbledore the idea of physical immortality is problematic because it takes the focus away from spiritual maturation. As Jacques Derrida (2004:123) contends, the “fear of death is what gives all witchcraft, all occult medicine, a hold”. The dark magic that Voldemort employs is a manifestation of his fear of death. In his “greed for life” (Derrida 2004:126), Voldemort has neglected the immortality of the soul. Dumbledore, on the other hand, presents Harry Potter with a perspective on death that is sobering within the context of the *lapis* and the promise of immortality. At the same place that he dismisses the *lapis* he informs Harry Potter that “After all, to the well-organised mind, death is but the next great adventure” (Rowling 1997:215). If Dumbledore’s wisdom is to be adhered to, then it is clear that death is not a spectre of finality in Rowling’s philosophical universe. While Voldemort might imagine that there can be nothing worse than death there are several incidents throughout the novels that indicate that Rowling views death more as a limen than an imposition. This position is ultimately clarified toward the end of *The Deathly Hallows*. Dumbledore tells Harry Potter, “You are the true master of death, because the true master does not seek to run away from Death” (Rowling 2007:577). The true

master of death understands that death is not only inevitable but also acceptable. Derrida (2004:126) presents a similar argument in his discussion on the *Phaedrus*. He highlights the philosophy that because death is acceptable, it becomes annulled: “In making us welcome death, the immortality of the soul... dissipates its terrifying fantasy” (Derrida 2004:126). The experience of death becomes indispensable to the immortality of the soul.

Such statements may be perceived as the culmination of Rowling’s discourse on death. Harry Potter is a child whose life has been defined by death, not unlike Voldemort. He was orphaned at an early age because his parents were murdered, and he eventually learns that it is his destiny to either destroy Voldemort or be killed himself.<sup>8</sup> The entire *Harry Potter* series repeatedly places its protagonist in a situation where he must undergo a symbolic death (Granger 2003:[sp]; 2007a:65,123), so that he can die to himself and mature into his true destiny. The maturation of Harry Potter comes at a great cost to himself. The empowering of Voldemort, on the other hand, comes at great cost to others. If anything, Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels are as much an exposition of what Voldemort has “missed” as they are about what her protagonist is learning.

Rowling establishes and utilises this dichotomy of Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort in order to unveil her alchemical philosophy. Through his education at Hogwarts and the trials of his life, Harry Potter is learning what it means to be an “alchemist”. Whether or not he is aware of it, he is embarking on a process that is designed to purify and perfect him, to strip him of selfishness, and raise him up to become a type of *lapis* himself. In essence the gold is Harry Potter’s perfected soul, and his immortality is an immortality of spirit. This statement can only be understood if alchemy is radically reconceived. There is a spiritual aspect to alchemy that must be considered. It is interesting to note Harry’s question to his mentor. “How did I get the Stone out of the Mirror?” In other words, why was Harry able to obtain the *lapis* and “lift” it out of a magical mirror, when Voldemort and his accomplice Professor Quirrell were unable to do so? Dumbledore answers his question by informing him that “only one who wanted to *find* the Stone – find it, but not use it – would be able to get it, otherwise they’d just see themselves making gold or drinking the Elixir of Life” (Rowling 1997:217).

Dumbledore calls this trial one of his “more brilliant ideas” (Rowling 1997:217). Because of Voldemort’s selfish nature, he could never see in the mirror anything beyond his base desire to drink the elixir of immortality and return himself to a physical body. Voldemort has no appreciation, or perhaps no understanding, that alchemy has a deeply spiritual expression that is not limited to material desires. He cannot comprehend that the true value of the *lapis* lies in its

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<sup>8</sup> According to the prophecy revealed in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling 2003:741), it is Harry’s destiny to either kill Voldemort, or in turn be killed himself, because “either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives”.

offer of spiritual salvation and immortality; a prospect supposedly far better than his own twisted attempts at delaying death. Harry Potter, on the other hand, is a *seeker*.<sup>9</sup> This title already hints that his quest is ultimately a spiritual one, and it is his desire to *find* the *lapis*, whatever this might entail in the context. He seemingly has little intention of using it for selfish gain. He only desires to prevent Voldemort from getting it. Rather than running away from death, he embraces it. He learns the alchemical idea that true immortality can only be achieved through initiatory “death”. Throughout the novels Harry Potter is learning what spiritual alchemy is, and subsequently the “true”<sup>10</sup> meaning of the *lapis*.

The concluding chapters of *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007) place Harry Potter in a position where he chooses to sacrifice himself in order to destroy one of Voldemort’s remaining Horcruxes, and to prevent the further deaths of his friends. It is clear that the narrative events of the *Harry Potter* novels are hinting towards a deeper, spiritual understanding of alchemy. Such alchemy is closely tied to themes of death and spiritual progression. Rowling shows little interest in a *lapis* that can produce physical gold or an elixir of life. She would not have had it destroyed, or had Albus Dumbledore dismiss it as “not such a wonderful thing” (Rowling 1997:215) if she were. According to the concluding events of *The Philosopher’s Stone*, those who seek to use the *lapis* for material gain are unable to find it. There is a message that they have missed the “true” focus of alchemy. This focus is spiritual and initiatory in nature, at least as far as Rowling constructs her symbolism.

## 2.2. Alchemical Death and Rebirth

Symbolic death, therefore, is a defining limen in the Harry Potter series. The recurring theme of death and suffering in the Harry Potter novels is not simply an outlet for the author’s personal struggle with the passing away of her mother. Death is a pervasive theme in alchemy and throughout world mythologies. It may be argued that the *Harry Potter* novels are a

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<sup>9</sup> In the Harry Potter novels the protagonist plays a wizard sport called Quidditch. The team is composed of seven players, and the most important of these seven is the “seeker”: a player who is required to capture a small golden ball in order to finish the game. In generalised spiritual terms, a *seeker* may be considered a person or adept that seeks the path of illumination, either to self-realisation, to God, or both, depending on the religious contexts.

<sup>10</sup> The use of the term “true” alchemy is problematic as far as it implies that there is a single absolute alchemical perspective that is correct while all other approaches to, and interpretations of, the art are inferior. It is not the desire of this study to indicate that there is an absolute interpretation to the convoluted and historically pervasive discipline of alchemy. The adjective “true” with regards to alchemy is used only to differentiate a view of alchemy that is in some agreement with Rowling’s understanding of alchemy as opposed to any contrary interpretation of alchemical philosophy. In other words, from the perspective of the narrative and symbolism of the *Harry Potter* novels, there is a “true” manifestation of alchemy, and then there are the erroneous interpretations of alchemy as espoused by many of the characters that Rowling reveals throughout the novels.

reconstruction of such archetypal mythic themes. The author is certainly aware of the foundation upon which she is building. As mentioned in the introduction, many of her characters have mythological names, for example Parvati Patil, Minerva McGonagall, Dedalus Diggle and Hestia Jones. The mention of mythic creatures such as the stag, the phoenix and the hippogriff indicate a wide source of symbolism and the universal themes that are echoed through her novels.

Whether death is embodied as a god, as a king, as a villainous serpent that the hero must conquer, or through the underworld to which the hero must descend, it remains a pertinent thematic element of mythology. According to Joseph Campbell (1976a:50,54), mythology is a text in which constant human suffering and overcoming can be read. Karen Armstrong (2005:3) explains that myth is “nearly always rooted in the experience of death and the fear of extinction”. Subsequently, Campbell (1976a:118) contends that, “Death was a mighty presence who had to be faced boldly even within the safest sanctuary, and whose force had to be assimilated”. Birth and death are strong defining elements in human culture. In agrarian societies both death and birth were associated with the earth. Plants emerge from the dank soil of the earth, so it is not a stretch to accept that the earth was envisaged as a type of maternal womb. It is the earth that gives life, but to which life must ultimately return. Metaphorically, a seed enters the ground to die, but it is also there that it is reborn into a new plant (Muir 2004b *cf.* 1913:[sp]). Similarly, a burial is in effect “a re-entry into the womb for rebirth” (Campbell 1976a:66). The mythic hero or heroic god is consequently required to descend into the underworld, for it is a place of simultaneous death and rebirth (Campbell 1993:311), and there “can be no ascent to the highest heaven without a prior descent into the depths of the earth” (Armstrong 2005:26).

The *Harry Potter* novels also play upon this strong metaphor of death, burial and rebirth. In each of the seven *Harry Potter* novels the protagonist must “descend”, sometimes beneath the earth, to face a symbolic death before he can emerge victorious and renewed of mind. In *The Philosopher’s Stone* (Rowling 1997) Harry Potter descends beneath a trapdoor guarded by a large three-headed dog, similar to the mythic Cerberus who prevented the living from entering the Greek Underworld and the dead from escaping it (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:175). He has to fight his way through deadly “Devil’s Snare”, a constricting plant, and pass a number of trials before he can face Professor Quirrell and procure the *lapis*.

In *The Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling 1998) the protagonist must again descend, this time to the nether regions of Hogwarts Castle and a hidden chamber called the “Chamber of Secrets”. The location of the chamber is particularly symbolic. Not only is it underground, it is also located near Hogwarts Lake. The allusion is to a primordial body of water, another symbol of the divine



creative womb. Kirchweger (qtd in Eliade 1978:153) writes in *Aurea Catena Homeri* that “this is certain, that all nature was in the beginning water, and that through water all things were born and again through water all things must be destroyed”. It is in the chamber that Harry Potter encounters the basilisk, a mythic serpent-like creature with the power to kill people unfortunate enough to look it in the eye. The serpent, also the symbolic lord of waters (Campbell 1976c:10), is a prototypical symbol of the spirit of death that the protagonist must conquer.

Such mythic patterns do not end with *The Chamber of Secrets*. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling 1999), Harry Potter again comes face to face with another symbol of death: a large black dog. It is later revealed that the black dog is in fact his godfather, Sirius Black, who is an *animagus*: a wizard capable of transforming himself into an animal. However, before Rowling reveals her narrative twist, she announces the symbolic potency of the black dog. It is a harbinger of doom, a spectre of death. It is Professor Trelawney, the divination teacher, who informs Harry Potter of its nature: “The Grim, my dear, the Grim... The giant spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen – the worst omen – of death!” (Rowling 1999:82-83). It is only after Harry Potter has descended beneath the “Womping Willow” tree and entered a secret underground passage that he encounters Sirius Black, the black dog. Symbolically, the Womping Willow tree functions as a representation of the world axis: the Tree of Life. It delineates the rotation point of the world, and the junction of Heaven and Earth (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:61). The mythic tree extends through and connects all three levels of the cosmos; its roots burrow through the underworld, its trunk occupies the earth’s surface, while its upper branches reach for the light of heaven (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1026). It is no accident that the Norse god Odin, who received the souls of dead warriors, spent nine days hanging upside down from the World Tree *Yggdrasill* in order to gain power over the nine worlds (Storl 2004:104-105). Harry Potter’s descent beneath the roots of the Womping Willow is his symbolic descent into the underworld, via a passage that leads him to an abandoned house, and an encounter with the deathly black dog.

At the end of *The Goblet of Fire* (Rowling 2000), Harry Potter is not transported directly underground. Instead he finds himself in a graveyard, another place of death, to observe the return or “rebirthing” of Voldemort. In *The Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling 2003) the climactic events take place in the Department of Mysteries at the Ministry of Magic. This department is coincidentally also underground, and it is here that he encounters Voldemort yet again. In *The Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling 2005) Albus Dumbledore takes Harry Potter with him to recover one of Voldemort’s Horcruxes. The Horcrux is hidden in a cave, and Harry Potter is placed in mortal peril when he has to fend off numerous reanimated corpses. In the final novel, *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007), Harry Potter “descends” on numerous occasions. He returns to the Ministry of Magic, travels to the subterranean vaults of Gringotts Wizard Bank and even

undergoes a “baptismal” descent into an icy pool in the Forest of Dean to retrieve the Sword of Gryffindor. These examples are by no means exhaustive.

None of these symbolic references to death and descent are coincidental. Alchemy, like a significant portion of world mythology, has developed its symbolism from the agrarian idea of the dying seed. These ideas are transported into certain mythologies through the idea of a vegetative deity: a god of the crop who usually suffers bodily mutilation, death and burial before he is reborn. This “dying god” becomes a common motif in alchemy. The alchemist treats his matter like a god and re-enacts his symbolic passion, death and “resurrection” in order to transmute the matter (Eliade 1978:150). When alchemy reached Latin Europe, the symbolism received a particularly Christian nature. Death, burial and resurrection were equated with the Christ and the mysteries of salvation.

It is not surprising then to find that alchemy is sometimes referred to as “Celestial Agriculture” (Klossowski de Rola 1997:98). The alchemist believes that he is imitating and improving upon the divine work wrought through Nature. Explained in simple terms, the alchemist believes that “every substance contains undeveloped resources and potentialities” (Muir 2004b *cf.* 1913:[sp]). These resources are imagined to be a type of seed: something that can be nurtured and transformed, that has the potential to grow into a perfected, living plant. The alchemist understands the laws of nature, therefore the seed cannot be released into perfection if it is not first destroyed. “Destruction perfects that which is good” according to the sixteenth century alchemist Paracelsus ([sa]a:[sp]). For this reason alchemists are quick to quote scripture. As the Christ reminds his listeners, “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it stays just a grain; but if it dies, it produces a big harvest” (*John 12.24*, Stern 1998:1347). If this is the alchemical pattern that Rowling is following, then it is clear why Harry Potter must face symbolic death. It is the destruction of his old nature. This process is so traumatic that at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling 2003:726) Harry Potter yells at Dumbledore, “I don’t want to be human”. He no longer wants the capacity to feel emotion. He resents the pain and suffering he has undergone, the loss of his godfather and the betrayal that he feels. These “growing pains” are an unfortunate but necessary part of his “initiation” into adulthood and into his heroic destiny.

Given the context of agriculture and the death and rebirth of the seed, it could be assumed that alchemy has a particularly botanical emphasis. While there are alchemical disciplines that work with organic materials, the most predominant form of alchemy has been practised with metals. The essential agrarian idea is retained, however. From the perspective of the alchemist, metals contain within their hard shell the “germinal seed” or “life spark” from which gold can be generated (Abraham 1998:180). These metals are thought to be alive because they are a part of

Nature, the “mother” of life (Eliade 1978:42). Metal ores are extracted from the living womb of the earth, and had they been left to ripen or mature naturally they would eventually become the imperial metal gold. Gold is the perfection of metals because it does not rust or decay; it is immortal and resplendent and its colour reminds the alchemist of divine glory and of the light of illumination.

It is the alchemical belief that Nature will perfect her progeny (Campbell 1974:255; Eliade 1978:114; Linden 2003:14-16; Muir 2004b *cf.* 1913:[sp]). Thus, while the act of mining could be conceived as a type of abortion, the alchemist in turn believes that he is assisting Nature in achieving her ideal by converting those extracted metals to their perfect form (Yazid 2003:72). As Mercia Eliade (1978:52) explains, the alchemist “assists Nature to fulfil her final goal, to attain her ‘ideal’, which is the perfection of its progeny – be it mineral, animal or human – to its supreme ripening, which is absolute immortality and liberty” (Eliade 1978:52). Just as gold is believed to be the perfect metal, so man is understood to be the most perfect of animals (Muir 2004b *cf.* 1913:[sp]). The problem is that from the perspective of the alchemist, man is a fallen being who has lost his spiritual capacity (Granger 2003:[sp]; 2007a:50).<sup>11</sup> Alchemy is the means by which this perfection can, once again, be attained. Hence the alchemist understands that he is perfecting himself at the same time that he is working with his metals, because the perfectibility and transmutability of metals is related to the perfectibility and transmutability of man (Eliade 1978:47, 124). This is a difficult concept to understand today because contemporary culture usually distinguishes between an objective and a subjective reality, and particularly between the sign and the referent. However, as Karen Armstrong (2005:15-16) explains, the Greek word *symbolleîn* (from which the English ‘symbol’ is derived) means ‘to throw together’; hence the symbolic act (the sign) and the reality (the referent) become one. The alchemist may be attempting to produce gold in his laboratory, but he is also attempting to transmute his own soul into resplendent gold. The two processes mirror each other.

From this understanding it is clear that alchemy develops an external as well as an internal dimension. The external dimension, the work that occurs in the laboratory, is linked to practical experimentation and may be perceived as the exoteric manifestation of alchemy. The internal alchemy, the work that occurs inside of the alchemist, is the spiritual or esoteric expression of alchemy. The alchemist who has mastered himself is able to master the metals in his laboratory. Hence the ability to transmute base metals to gold can be understood as a manifestation of the divine perfection that has occurred simultaneously within the alchemist. According to

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<sup>11</sup> This interpretation of alchemy illustrates the influence of Christian theology on practicing alchemy. While correlations may be found within Gnostic and more traditionally Hermetic alchemy, this perspective is by no means universal, and the reader should be aware of the fact that while alchemy was a quest for human perfection, not all alchemists perceived the human animal as “fallen” in the sense of the doctrine of “original sin”.

Paracelsus (qtd in Marshall 2001:444), “no one can transmute any matter if he is not transmuted himself”.

In Chinese alchemy these external and internal alchemical disciplines are segregated into *wai tan* alchemy and *nei tan* alchemy (Read 1933:253). The alchemists that specialise in *wai tan* alchemy work in their laboratories in an attempt to manufacture real gold by artificial means. Such gold is not valued for its intrinsic value, but rather because of its “magical efficacy”. The Chinese alchemists believe that gold is the metal of immortality, and that they can procure longevity if they eat from golden vessels and ingest a “golden pill” (Davis 1936b:557). *Nei tan* alchemists, on the other hand, search for a symbolic “golden flower”. In Chinese symbolism gold represents light, while the flower represents the opening up of the mind to this light. *Nei tan* alchemists are interested in awakening the hidden potential of the real self: a form of spiritual illumination and transformation guided by the mind. These alchemists seek to “enter eternity in the midst of time” (Marshall 2001:59). To the spiritual, *nei tan* alchemist immortality is not to be found in an elixir, but rather inside of the liberated alchemist.

Similarly, in seventeenth century Europe the Rosicrucian alchemists, who practised a Theosophical strain of alchemy, boasted that “godless and accursed gold-making” was easy (Roob 2005:14). However, this was a marginal pursuit when compared to the search for inner perfection. This is in contrast to practising laboratory alchemists of the seventeenth century who attempted to improve the empirical foundations of alchemy. While these divergent views may have become inseparable, the “classical” European alchemy (derived from Paracelsus), upon which both were founded, was focused on combining technical skills with practical experience (Roob 2005:14). Hence, while the symbolism of alchemy is inherently spiritual, its language remains technical and metallurgic. The alchemical symbolism presented in this chapter assumes that alchemy is a spiritual quest and that the *lapis* is a spiritual attainment. After all, Harry Potter isn’t manufacturing literal gold in an alchemy laboratory somewhere in Hogwarts Castle. Rather, he is embarking on a heroic quest that has a spiritual outcome for the protagonist. Therefore, since the laboratory and internal processes are related, the spiritual process that Harry Potter is undertaking is still explained in relation to, and using, the technical jargon of metallurgic mythology and practice.

### **2.3. Alchemy, Metallurgy, and the Creative Fire**

It is in the primitive origins of alchemy that the meaning of most of its symbolism can be traced. From the perspective of Mercia Eliade (in Marshall 2001:20), “alchemists undoubtedly shared a common ancestry with shamans, magicians, smiths and to a lesser extent miners, who were

custodians of the magic arts of transformation and the secret primordial forces of the earth”. Alchemy was therefore not merely a technical exercise. It arose out of a mystical sympathy with the world. In Iron Age mythology (ca. 1200-550 BCE, depending on the region), metals were not simple inorganic materials. Rather they were a token of the world above, a sign of the heavenlies embedded in the earth. Metal was worshipped as a gateway to the transcendental. The ability to manipulate such metal in turn becomes a sacred position, a superhuman feat concomitant with the magico-religious prestige bestowed upon the metals (Eliade 1978:27-29). The metal is destroyed by fire, magically plied into a new form and endowed with the ability to aid or destroy humanity. A new form is created at the expense of the old. This follows the mythological idea that life can only be engendered from another life that has been immolated. This is a part of the divine creative act, and the alchemist is the microcosm of this principle: “When the Great Alchemist’s [i.e. the Creative God’s] Spirit breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life, the fire of creative Spirit filled the clay tabernacle. An embryonic god was born”, according to the esoteric alchemical proclamations of Saint Germain (Prophet & Prophet 1993:155). If immolation is required to kindle the travail of the universe, then the alchemical act is not exempt from this principle.

It has already been declared that in alchemy the new, perfected metal cannot arise until the old form has been utterly destroyed. The creative act therefore requires a sacrifice, often in blood: “Creation is sacrifice. One can put life into what one has created only by giving it one’s own life (blood, tears, sperm, ‘soul’, etc.)” (Eliade 1978:32). Hence, returning to agricultural societies, a practice can be observed where a human (or sometimes animal) sacrifice is made for the benefit of the coming harvest. The victim is killed, his body cut into pieces and strewn over the earth to make it fertile or to quicken the vegetative growth (Eliade 1978:33; Frazer 2003:212,344; Graves 1999:376). Again, such sacrifices are sympathetic acts. “These are not gifts, bribes, or dues rendered to God, but fresh enactments, here and now, of the god’s own sacrifice in the beginning, through which he, she, or it became incarnate in the world process” (Campbell 1976a:181). Just as the creative god became incarnate in the universal travail through his own sacrifice, the alchemical metal is sacrificed so that its germinal seed may arise. At the same time the alchemist dies to his old nature to be spiritually reborn.

Such beliefs and practices illustrate that mythology, and in particular alchemical mythology, derives its ideology from “an experience of mystical sympathy with the world. It is the idea of life which, projected upon the cosmos, sexualises it” (Eliade 1978:34). In other words, the greater world, the macrocosm, is related to the internal world of man, the microcosm. In an anthropocentric view of the cosmos, man is the image of the universe as much as the universe is conceived through the metaphor of man. Therefore, what applies to the world, and subsequently to metals, also applies to the human condition. The human body and the cosmos become



interchangeable symbolic systems. This view implies that the world is understood in terms of an anthropocentric destiny: birth, development and eventual death. Sexuality, fecundity, death and rebirth become the predominant forces of the universe (Eliade 1978:34).

From such a perspective the living world must have been created, or at least born, and there are many mythological tales that recount the first instances of the universe. It is not surprising that in many metallurgical cultures creation is believed to be the work of a Smith-God, a creative principle and “god of fire and spirit” (*Corpus Hermeticum 1.9*, Copenhagen 1995:2), who forges the world through a mystical hammer and anvil. The Bakitara tribe of the Congo believed that the anvil was the bride of the divine Blacksmith (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996:31). Subsequently the interaction of the symbolic hammer and anvil is like the sexual union of the male and female principles. Their amalgamation is a union of heat and fire, and subsequently a symbolic fire precedes the creation of the world. It is the moulding element of the creative forge or else it arises from the heat of divine intercourse (Eliade 1978:39-40). The sacrifice required to engender creation is therefore an immolation by fire. Mercia Eliade (1978:39) explains that “In Vedic India the sacrificial altar (*vedi*) was looked upon as female and the ritual fire (*agni*) as male and ‘their union brought forth offspring’”.

This is why Prometheus’s theft of fire from heaven is such a potent symbolic action. Fire is not simply a destructive element. It is also the creative principle, a civilising boon. It is a gift from the creative Smith-God, the “architect and artisan of the Gods” (Eliade 1978:98). Not only does he create and organise the world, but he brings civility to mankind. He provides the creative, metallurgic fire and subsequently the implements necessary to cultivate the soil. He is the civilising saviour, the “manifestation of divine wisdom to the world” (Campbell 1993:73), and a spiritual counsellor to man. He “continues and completes the work of God by making man capable of understanding the mysteries” (Eliade 1978:96). His earthly representatives share in these mysteries. They are the “masters of fire” (Eliade 1978:86): shamans, smiths, heroes and mythic kings (the founders of dynasties). To this list can be added the alchemist and the potter: those enlightened individuals who manipulate materials extracted from the earth by fire, essentially to create something valuable out of something worthless (Campbell 1976a:72).

Harry “the” Potter is himself such a “master of fire”. Rowling includes copious symbolic annotations to ensure that her protagonist is associated with the element of fire. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry has four houses: Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. According to Rowling (Anelli & Spartz 2005:[sp]), each of these houses correspond to one of the four elements of occidental tradition: fire, water, earth and air respectively. Harry Potter is placed in Gryffindor house: the house of “fire”, whose symbol is a heraldic lion (Rowling 1997:91). In Kabbalistic tradition, the lion is the aspect of the element of fire around

the throne of God. In addition to this, Harry Potter's birthday is on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, placing him firmly within the astrological influence of Leo, the great lion.<sup>12</sup> Leo is incidentally a fire sign. Additionally, Rowling (1997:65) has ensured that the core of Harry's magic wand is a phoenix feather. The phoenix is a mythic bird that immolates itself by fire only to be reborn from its own ashes. All of the characters that have a major influence on Harry Potter – Albus Dumbledore, Sirius Black, and Rubeus Hagrid – are associated with Gryffindor House.

The creative God, the God of forge and fire, is not only a civilising hero, he is also the conqueror who destroys chaos and vanquishes unrighteousness. He forges the weapons that either he or another deity must use to overcome the great serpent. In Egypt Ptah, the “Potter-God” (Budge 1973a:372; Eliade 1978:98) forges the weapons that allow Horus to overcome his rival Set. In Greece, Hephaestus constructs the thunderbolt that Zeus uses to conquer Typhon, and in Scandinavia it is Mjöltnir's hammer that permits Thor to crush the serpent Midgardsormr (Eliade 1978:98). Similarly, the cultural “hero has to fight the serpent in order to release man from his fallen state [chaos and darkness], often pictured in mythological terms as securing the fruit from the Cosmic Tree after combating the monster-guardian” (Brabazon 2003:[sp]). Thus the hero re-enacts the battle of the civilising god over chaos and darkness, by battling the monstrous serpent using the divine weapons of the Smith. His reward is to eat of the divine fruit of immortality. Similarly, the alchemist who conquers the chaos of the impure metal is rewarded with the golden fruit of the *lapis*.<sup>13</sup>

These mythic tales are recounted in the exploits of Harry Potter. In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry faces the basilisk, the spirit of death and archetype of evil. The giant serpent-like creature is slain because Harry Potter drives a silver sword through the roof of the serpent's mouth (Rowling 1998:236). This sword, the Sword of Gryffindor, is a “lost treasure, a masterpiece of goblinwork” (Rowling 2007:409) – in other words an artefact of supreme artistry not forged by human hands. It has the ability to absorb the properties of any object more powerful than it, making it a truly remarkable weapon. Yet, while Harry Potter wields this pseudo-divine weapon to fight the serpent, the symbol that ultimately saves his life is the phoenix. Not only does the bird blind the basilisk, but it also heals the venomous wounds that the basilisk inflicted on him.

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<sup>12</sup> While Rowling makes no explicit mention of the importance of astrological symbolism in the *Harry Potter* series, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that astrological symbolism should be taken into consideration, particularly since the majority of the Black family is named after stars. Relevant astrological symbolism is discussed later in this study.

<sup>13</sup> In alchemical symbology, the *lapis* is often compared to the golden apples of the tree of the Hesperian gardens (Abraham 1998:101). The garden, guarded by a large dragon, is itself a symbolic paradise, and to eat the golden fruit would indicate the attainment of immortality (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:504). The final chapter of *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:603) opens with the words: “Autumn seemed to arrive suddenly that year. The morning of the first of September was *crisp and golden as an apple*” (emphasis added). The monstrous serpent Voldemort has been destroyed, Harry Potter has emerged victorious, and now, 19 years later, the author hints that the alchemical work is complete. Harry Potter has attained the symbolic perfection of the “golden apple”: the *lapis*.

The phoenix has long been a symbol of cosmological reincarnation, of the cycle of death and rebirth (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:752-753). It is fitting that the basilisk, traditionally a serpent-like creature of death, is conquered by a spirit of new-born life. The basilisk is linked to Salazar Slytherin and the element of water. The phoenix, on the other hand, lives and dies by fire; it embodies both the creative and destructive properties of the flame, and to Harry Potter it is a symbol of hope in the face of death. The battle between Fawkes, the phoenix, and the basilisk is ultimately a battle between the elements of fire and water. In alchemy the phoenix is the symbol of renewal and immortality, a representation of the *lapis* (Abraham 1998:152), itself perfected through fire. The alchemist is the ultimate manipulator of fire. His crucible becomes a surrogate womb where his metals can conquer chaos and death and be born again. Fire is not just a creative principle; it is an emblem of the impending victory of the civilising Smith-God over chaos and formlessness. Subsequently it is the symbol of Harry Potter's imminent victory.

#### **2.4. Alchemy and Divine Union**

The divine craftsman, the god of the forge, usually works with materials that are already in existence. In Gnostic and Hermetic theology, the Creative God is a "demiurge", one who works "for the people". This craftsman does not generate material out of nothing, but rather works with materials already provided and bends these to his will (Copenhaver 1995:104). Like the creative deity, the alchemist is required to use the base materials that he has at hand. He can merely imitate the creative impulse, and he is bound to the laws of Nature. According to Lucretius (qtd in Muir 2004b *cf.* 1913:[sp]), it is the first principle of Nature that "Nothing is ever gotten out of nothing". The alchemist must make use of the base metals that he has at his disposal, because gold cannot be made from nothing. In Nature creation is closely tied to destruction. Creation is a product of reproduction, and from an anthropocentric perspective this is a sexual activity: "The sexual organs are supposed to have appeared at the time of this coming of death. Reproduction without death would be a calamity, as would death without reproduction" (Campbell 1976a:177). Death and sex become interdependent in a sexualised cosmos, so that the alchemist cannot conceive of one without the other. "It is the attribute of God alone to make one out of one; you must produce one thing out of two by natural generation", according to one alchemist (Muir 2004b *cf.* 1913:[sp]).

Again, the symbolism is biological. A seed can only produce life if it is fertilised: a male and female "part" must combine and become one. The metals extracted from the earth are no different to the plants given birth by the same generative womb. Just as the sky and the earth, or the sun and the moon, are conceived as alternately male and female in many mythological narratives, so metals contain masculine and feminine principles. This cosmological dualism is

essential to the functioning of alchemy (Davis 1936a:328). Much of the symbolic writings and illustrations of alchemy depict a divine wedding: of male and female, of brother and sister, of king and queen, or of sun and moon. It is the creative alchemist who conducts the marriage ceremony of metals. This “master of fire”, re-enacting the function of the creative deity, facilitates this process in his laboratory: the male and female seed are united in the symbolic heat of passion: the fire of the alchemical furnace. It is this fire that unites them at the same time that it destroys them, re-enacting the mythic love-death ritual (Campbell 176a:177) and forever solidifying the interdependency of sex and death, of (pro)creation and destruction. In death the lovers become one, ready to be reborn into a single offspring. As Muir (2004b *cf.* 1913:[sp]) reiterates, “Nature is one, there must be unity in all the diversity”.

This perfect union of the male and female principles highlights the importance of unity to the alchemist. If anything, the greatest desire of the alchemist is to overcome the division inherent in nature and the division within himself: “Man is a bisexual organism that forgot its bisexual origin” (Schwarz 1980:57). The person who is unaware of this only achieves half of his potential. The unified, androgynous personality is perfect (Schwarz 1980:57-58), and the alchemist who can overcome the division within himself and within his metals becomes perfect. Hence the ultimate quest of alchemy, the *lapis philosophorum*, is a symbolic offspring that is a hermaphrodite: an androgynous unity superior to its father and its mother. It is the perfect, fertilised seed, ripened and grown into maturity. It is the symbolic attainment of the “golden awareness” or *aurea apprehensio* (Schwarz 1980:57) within the mind and spirit of the alchemist.

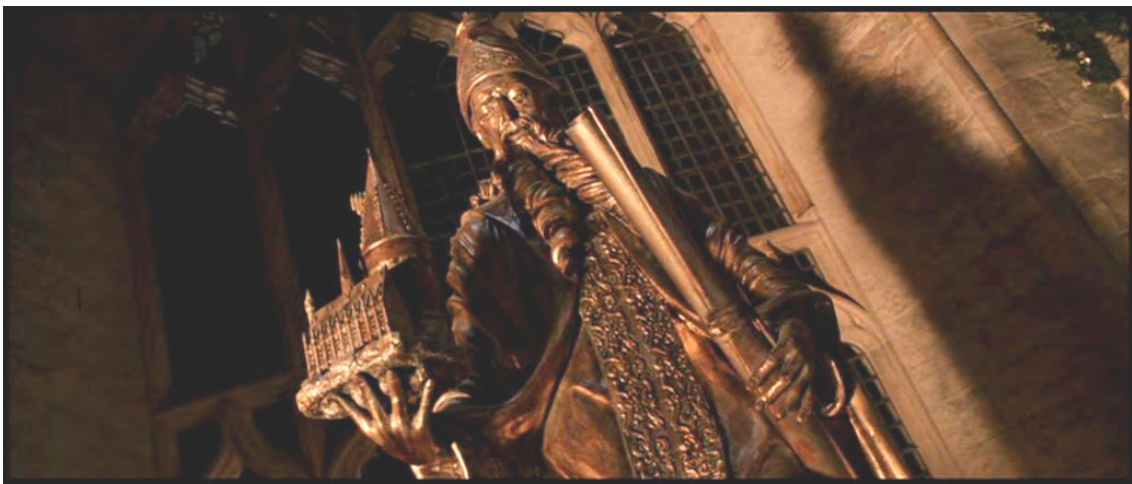
Androgyny is thus considered to be a step towards godhood and reconciliation. HP Blavatsky<sup>14</sup> (1925a:72), whose Theosophical synthesis of world religions reinstitutes a type of “matriarchal” hierarchy, recalls that gods “like Jupiter or Zeus, Son of Kronos-Saturn, ‘Infinite Time’... in their origin were represented as male-female”. In the mind of the alchemist, androgyny is equal to immortality: “In all mythologies, gods are immortal and androgynous. As a matter of fact, gods are immortal *because* they are androgynous” (Schwarz 1980:57).

The alchemist, therefore, becomes a supreme “unifier”, attempting to bring together the divisions in creation. The *lapis* is his symbolic conjunction of the male and female seed; at the same time it is also the union of the four elements. For this reason the *lapis* is sometimes called the “fifth element” or *quintessence*: a reconciliation of the four quarrelling elements of earth,

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<sup>14</sup> HP Blavatsky is given an interesting mention in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling 1999:45). Harry Potter’s prescribed divination handbook is *Unfogging the Future* by Cassandra Vablatsky. The author’s surname is clearly a reference to the discredited head of the Theosophical Society, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. In Greek mythology, Cassandra was the daughter of King Priam of Troy. Apollo gave her the boon of prophecy (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:851), but when she rejected him as a lover, she was cursed, and her prophecies were never believed.

air, fire and water into a harmonious unity (Abraham 1998:75). This idea is perfectly embodied in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The school is comprised of four houses and, as mentioned above, each house corresponds to one of the four elements of occidental tradition. The Sorting Hat, a magical object that decides into which of the four houses a student is to be placed, sings of a desire for unity: “Listen closely to my song: | Though condemned I am to split you | Still I worry that its wrong, | ... we must unite inside her [Hogwarts] | Or we’ll crumble from within” (Rowling 2003:186-187). This unity is finally revealed at the end of *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007), when Harry Potter’s return to Hogwarts, and the imminent threat of Voldemort’s army, allows the four Houses to overcome their differences and stand united against a common foe.



**Figure 1**

*Hogwarts Statue, top* (Columbus 2001).



**Figure 2**

*Hogwarts Statue, bottom* (Columbus 2001).



In the film of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), this idea of Hogwarts as a symbolic crucible of unity is taken one step further. There is a statue, located in one of the halls of Hogwarts Castle, that depicts an old man with a long beard, presumably some wizard, who holds what appears to be Hogwarts Castle in his right hand (see Figures 1 and 2). At his feet two animals are visible: a lion (symbolising Gryffindor), and a badger (symbolising Hufflepuff). It may be assumed that there are a serpent (Slytherin) and a raven (Ravenclaw) somewhere behind the figure, indicating that all four houses are represented in this statue. If so, then this statue points to a unity that is greater than the four houses. The figure is not simply one of the Hogwarts founders, it is a symbolic Grand Architect (Pike 1871:137; Prophet & Prophet 1993:155), who holds the unified school in his right hand and the divine plans in his left. The four mascots stand in harmony at his feet, indicating that Hogwarts is greater than the sum of its parts. The statue does bear an uncanny resemblance to depictions of Hermes Trismegistus, the wise sage and “founding father” of alchemy, with his long beard split into two paths (see Figure 3). Such analogy remains inconclusive, however, since long beards, robes and exotic hats are not uncommon in Rowling’s fantasy world.



**Figure 3**

*Hermes, Mercurius Trimegistus [sic] Contemporaneus Moysi.*

Marble floor panel, laid by Giovanni di Stefano, 1488, Siena

Cathedral (Marshall 2001:[sp]).



Just as the alchemist combines the four elements, so he combines the male and female principles of the metals. As Muir (2004b *cf.* 1913:[sp]) explains, “The conjoining of metals must go before the birth of the perfect metal”. The male principle is philosophical sulphur; it is the hot, dry and active seed of metals (Abraham 1998:193). According to the fourteenth century French alchemist Nicolas Flamel<sup>15</sup> ([sa]:[sp]), the male element of sulphur is “nothing but fire and air”. The female principle is philosophical quicksilver or *argent vive*; it is the cold, moist and receptive seed of metals (Abraham 1998:10). It is comprised of earth and water (Flamel [sa]:[sp]). Hence, once combined, philosophical mercury and quicksilver bring together the four elements of fire and air, earth and water. It is also the union of the four principles: hot and dry, cold and moist.

This theory of the four principles and the four elements is derived from Aristotle’s *Meteorology* (2003:35). In this theory he maintains that each of the four elements can be transformed into another, because they share the common principles (*cf.* Plato 2003:33). In other words, earth and water would share coldness, while water and air would share moistness (Abraham 1998:68). It is this theory that gives rise to the alchemical idea that metals can be transmuted, because all bodies contain these elements in different proportions. If these elements are harmoniously united, as described above, then the *lapis* can be formed (Abraham 1998:68). This union is achieved because the alchemist has managed to marry together the male and female seeds, and in so doing united the elements.

In the *Harry Potter* series these two fundamental principles are represented by the characters of Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger (Granger 2003:[sp]; 2007a:63). Ronald Weasley is the red-haired, choleric friend of Harry Potter. He is the embodiment of alchemical sulphur, the fiery male seed. Sulphur is often represented as a royal king, just as the etymology of Ronald suggests that the name is linked to rule and authority.<sup>16</sup> The royal consort of the king is, of course, alchemical mercury. This female principle is represented by Hermione Granger, Harry’s cool and phlegmatic female friend. Her name is a feminised version of Hermes (Granger 2003:[sp]), the Greek messenger god, and she often acts as a messenger within the confines of Rowling’s narratives. She is always the one who has researched the relevant information, and it is particularly enlightening that it is Hermione who reveals to Harry and Ronald the identity of Nicolas Flamel. She acts as the true alchemical herald, making Harry Potter aware of the

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<sup>15</sup> Nicolas Flamel is mentioned in *The Philosopher’s Stone* as the “only known maker” of the *lapis* (Rowling 1997:161). Rowling plays on the reports of Flamel’s own writings and the common myth that he did in fact discover immortality through the *lapis*, claiming that he “celebrated his six hundred and sixty-fifth birthday last year”. This well-researched little anecdote by the author places his birthday, from the date of publication of the book, at 1331 CE, which is usually the recorded date.

<sup>16</sup> The name Ronald is a Scottish appropriation of the Scandinavian *Ragnvald* composed of the words for “rule” and “advice”, (*Behind the Name* [sa]:[sp]) hence indicating a ruler, or even a king, who rules with counsel.

alchemist and his need to find the *lapis*. Hermes is the Greek equivalent of Mercury, the god whose name now graces the metal quicksilver: the alchemical feminine seed. Moreover, her surname, Granger, is also significant. It is from the French *grangier*, ultimately derived from the Latin *granum*, or “grain”. The surname thus refers to an old “farm bailiff” (*Behind the Name* [sa]:[sp]). Considering that alchemy is also known as “Celestial Agriculture”, her name and surname are most appropriate.



**Figure 4**

*Conjuge fratrem cum sorore et propina illis poculum amoris* (Unite the brother with the sister and offer them the cup of love). From M. Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, Emblema IV, Frankfurt, 1618 (Klossowski de Rola 1997:73).

These two seeds, sulphur and mercury, are often referred to as the “quarrelling couple” (Granger 2003:[sp]) for they are antagonistic by nature. The one is choleric, hot and dry, while the other is cold and phlegmatic (Klossowski de Rola 1997:97). Nevertheless, if the alchemist is to succeed then he must unite these two. Often these two seeds are depicted as a brother and sister, the metaphor of incest being used to establish their opposite but complementary natures. In Michael Maier’s *Atalanta Fugiens*, the brother and sister embrace while the cup of love is offered (see Figure 4). Their eventual union comes at a great price, however. As Nicolas Flamel (1624:[sp]) describes “being put together in the vessel of the Sepulcher [these two] do bite one another cruelly, and by their great poison, and furious rage, they never leave one another... till both of them by their slaving venom, and mortal hurts... [kill] one another”. This is an alchemical enactment of the mythic love-death ritual. As such, sexuality, fecundity, death and rebirth are eternally united, and the term the “quarrelling couple” is well deserved. Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley are the embodiment of this “quarrelling couple”. They continually argue with one another throughout the series, yet at the end of *The Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling

2005:421) they reconcile their differences and jealousies and move towards a literal depiction of symbolic love and unity. In *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:254,604) they are briefly estranged but ultimately reunited and married.

Unity and androgyny are such important alchemical themes that Rowling does not leave the symbolism there. Harry Potter himself, being Rowling's human representation of the *lapis*, is the ultimate symbolic hermaphrodite. In *The Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling 1997:90-91) Harry encounters the Sorting Hat when he first arrives at Hogwarts. The hat has great difficulty deciding which house to place Harry Potter in. Ultimately it places him in Gryffindor and not Slytherin because Harry urges the hat to do so. This is the first hint that Harry Potter has a "dual personality" in the symbolic sense. It is finally revealed in *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:550-551) that Harry's scar is one of Voldemort's Horcruxes. In other words, Harry Potter carries a part of the soul of Voldemort inside of himself. This is the reason for the confusion of the Sorting Hat; it is also the reason why Harry Potter and Voldemort have shared such an intimate connection, being able to access each other's thoughts. This means that symbolically, Harry Potter is both Slytherin and Gryffindor. His own bravery associates him with Gryffindor house, but the guile and determination of Voldemort's Horcrux speaks to Slytherin.

Harry Potter is therefore part elemental fire and part elemental water, and there is pertinent symbolic evidence to suggest this. In *The Chamber of Secrets*, it is revealed that the phoenix, the bird of fire loyal to Albus Dumbledore, aids Harry Potter in fighting the basilisk. In the same novel, Harry Potter also discovers that he is a Parselmouth: a wizard able to communicate with serpents (Rowling 1998:146). As mentioned before, the serpent is the symbolic lord of the waters (Campbell 1976c:10). In West African folklore, the ability to speak to serpents is believed to indicate a communion with water spirits, while "the Orphite sect used live snakes at their communion rite" (Brabazon 2003:[sp]). The Gryffindor/Slytherin dichotomy within Harry Potter is finally resolved when he realises that being a Slytherin is not necessarily a mark of dishonour or evil. He reveals this to his own son at the end of *The Deathly Hallows*. "Albus Severus," Harry says to his son, "you were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew" (Rowling 2007:607). He continues by explaining to his son that it doesn't matter to him whether he is chosen for Slytherin or Gryffindor. This reveals that Harry Potter has finally come to terms with the mark of Slytherin that he had so distrusted. The war of the contrary elements is resolved within him and he illustrates the *attitude* of a harmonious androgyny.

Voldemort, always the symbolic opposite of Harry Potter, similarly illustrates an attempt at androgyny. Just as Harry Potter contains a piece of him, so Voldemort acquires some of Harry Potter. During Voldemort's "rebirthing" at the end of *The Goblet of Fire*, he undertakes a Dark

Magic ritual where he uses Harry's Blood (precisely three drops according to the film (Newell 2005)) to resurrect himself from spirit into the flesh of a new body. The "new" Voldemort thus carries within him the blood of Harry Potter. Whether this hybridity is any form of alchemical androgyne is a moot point. Voldemort does not show the maturity or wisdom of one who has overcome the antagonisms between himself and the world. Voldemort is all about self and ego. He makes of himself a hybrid only to conquer his prior weakness: his inability to touch Harry Potter because of the lingering protection that Harry's mother's sacrifice had afforded him. Irrespective, Voldemort is a mock androgyne, a hybrid formed from an arcane ritual. It is this very nature that ultimately saves Harry's life at the end of *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:568).

Such recurrent themes of androgyny within the *Harry Potter* novels highlight the fundamental importance of the symbolic *lapis* as an androgynous offspring. The complete, undivided unity of the *lapis* is so unique that it is actually called the "Orphan" Stone (Jung 1989:17). This title serves a dual purpose, also emphasising the fact that the *lapis* is born from the death of its parents: sulphur and *argent vive* (Abraham 1998:139). It is the alchemist who becomes the foster-parent of the *lapis*, allowing its indivisible unity to mature. Appropriate to this symbolism, Rowling has determined that both Harry Potter and Voldemort must be orphans. Additionally, the majority of the *Harry Potter* narrative works toward themes of androgyny and reconciliation: an attempt at reunifying the rifts caused by quarrelling factions. There are splits between "Mud Bloods" (impure wizards) and "Pure Bloods", between Slytherin and Gryffindor, between Voldemort and Harry Potter, and between the wizarding community and other magical creatures. The final events of *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007) illustrate that harmony is possible, that differences can be overcome, and that polar opposites can be united to form a hybrid, androgynous community.

Clearly the concept of androgyny is as important to understanding the symbolism of the *Harry Potter* novels as the mytheme of death and rebirth. Rowling's novels do not employ these concepts loosely, for their narratives follow a strict pattern, dictated by the alchemical process. The alchemical work requires several stages before the orphan *lapis* can be perfectly matured. Just as the alchemical worldview presented in this chapter is fundamental to understanding Rowling's intentions, so the actual stages of the alchemical work are critical to interpreting her narrative direction. Chapter Three highlights the most important stages of the alchemical work, explaining how these stages correlate with the narrative of *Harry Potter*.



## CHAPTER 3

### *The Labour of Alchemy*

#### 3.1. Introduction

Understanding alchemical paradigms explains a great deal of the symbolism of the *Harry Potter* texts. All of the cosmological ideas of androgyny, fecundity, death and rebirth mentioned in Chapter Two dictate the practice of the alchemist. Just as these mythemes occur in the alchemical work, so they are mirrored through the narrative and symbolism of Harry Potter's destiny. As explained in the previous chapter, each *Harry Potter* novel follows a series of symbolic events. The protagonist is subjected to numerous challenges that expose his character and test his resolve. He must always descend to a symbolic underworld to battle not only evil, but also his own nature, and finally he must arise, renewed of mind, and one step closer to becoming a revelation of harmony and an embodiment of 'spiritual gold'. These events recur in the same order because they mimic the succession of the *opus alchymicum*, or alchemical work. Each *Harry Potter* novel reveals within its narrative the sequence of alchemical events. Additionally, the seven novels work together to form a complete alchemical narrative.

There is a reason why Rowling chose to write seven novels, corresponding to the seven years of Harry's education. It is often (though not exclusively) acknowledged that there are seven stages within the alchemical work. In *Cabala* (1616), the alchemist Steffan Michelspacher (in Klossowski de Rola 1997:56,58) illustrates a temple with seven steps leading up to the conjunction of the male sulphur and the female *argent vive*. He supplements this imagery by depicting the seven deities representing the seven prime planets: Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, Mars and Saturn. In alchemy each of these planets corresponds to a particular metal: gold, silver, tin, mercury, copper, iron and lead respectively (Linden 2003:21).

Andreas Libavius (in Klossowski de Rola 1997:50), another seventeenth century alchemist, also depicts an alchemical process with seven steps, culminating at the mythic tree of the Hesperian gardens, whose golden fruit symbolises the *lapis*. According to Klossowski de Rola (1997:51), the seven steps represent seven stages of alternating “*solve et coagula*”: the repeated dissolution and coagulation of the alchemical body, transmuting it from fluid to solid, and back again. Abraham (1998:187) explains that the “*opus alchymicum* consists of a repeated series of dissolutions and coagulations – the dissolution of the old metal of the Stone into the... original stuff from which it was created... and the coagulation of that pure metal into a more beautiful form”. It is understood that with “each cycle of *solve et coagula* the matter... becomes purer and more potent” (Abraham 1998:197, emphasis added). The reason why Libavius emphasises *seven* steps of *solve et coagula* is because each step is intended to correspond to one of the seven days of Biblical Creation. Since the alchemical work is a microcosmic re-Creation of these events, it is understandable why, in predominantly Christian Europe, the number seven carries such potent signification.

According to the Christian writer EW Bullinger (1967:158, 167-168), the number seven epitomises “spiritual perfection”. It is a number that represents the completion of God’s work, and in Hebrew, seven is derived from the root word *shevah*, meaning to be *satiated*. The symbolism of seven is certainly not restricted to a Christian iconography. In Ancient Egypt, the number seven was a symbol of eternal life (in a sense, the end goal of the *opus alchymicum*). Seven symbolised the “dynamic perfection of a complete cycle” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:859). Similarly, the Greek Hesperides, the daughters of Atlas and Hesperis, who lived in the garden together with the tree that bore golden apples (again, a symbol of the *lapis*), are said to have been seven in number (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:504,859). John Granger (2007a:78,80), interprets the alchemical symbolism of seven as follows:

Seven is a number of transcendence or divinization... Alchemy is a seven stage work because its aim is to restore the alchemist to the state of Adamic or primordial perfection (number 6 [the day on which Adam was created in the image of God]) and transcend this for communion or apotheosis with God (number 7). This restorative labor in correspondence with the purification of metals requires seven turnings or stages in which all the imperfections and imbalances within the soul are resolved by reagents causing the psyche to expand and contract (the *solve et coagula* of alchemical formula[e]).

Subsequently, Rowling has written seven novels relating to the seven stages of Harry Potter’s spiritual purification. In contrast, Voldemort (perhaps inspired by the Egyptian understanding of the number seven) attempts to split his soul into seven pieces in order to ensure his immortality. In both cases it is clear that the stages of the alchemical work dictate the events in the *Harry Potter* texts. It is not possible, within the scope of this study, to highlight each and every detail of the *opus alchymicum*. However, while there are numerous events that occur within the *opus*,



its basic process can be reduced to three simple phases, represented by the colours black, white and red, respectively. These three phases highlight the fundamental tenets of alchemy described in Chapter Two: a fertilised and unified seed must be formed by the union of a male and female principle; it must simultaneously be destroyed and buried (in the earth), before it is perfected and reborn as a new “plant”. At its culmination, the mature plant reveals the perfection of the seed, and becomes an immortal wellspring for new life. Clearly the alchemical work requires three principle events: death, purification and rebirth.

The number three is as fundamental to the symbolism of the *Harry Potter* series as the number seven. As Bullinger (1967:107) contends, “All things that are especially *complete* are stamped with this number three”. The Chinese contended that nothing could be added to the number three, as it was the expression of wholeness and fulfilment (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:993). It is a symbol of the fullness of the Godhead, the Three Persons of the Trinity, and it represents “*divine* perfection” (Bullinger 1967:109). Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger form the most obvious triad in the *Harry Potter* novels, representing the triune composition of man: spirit, soul and body. According to the alchemist Paracelsus (in Abraham 1998:176), “all metals were made from a three-fold matter: mercury (the spirit), sulphur (the soul) and salt (the body). While this view does differ from traditional alchemy described in Chapter Two, it expresses the fundamental importance of the number three. Rowling ensures that each of the *Harry Potter* novels, and the series in general, convey the three predominant stages of alchemy: the *nigredo* (black stage), the *albedo* (white stage) and the *rubedo* (red stage). The remainder of this chapter provides a brief explanation of these three stages, and how their inherent symbolism can be traced through the *Harry Potter* novels and films.

### **3.2. Alchemical Nigredo**

#### **3.2.1. *Death, Destruction and the Prima Materia***

The first stage of the alchemical work is called the *nigredo*. The name is derived from the Latin word *niger*, meaning “black”. It is thus the “black stage” of the alchemical work, associated with death, destruction and putrefaction. The *nigredo* is the stage where the old metal is destroyed in order to release its germinal “seed”. The metal is utterly reduced of its form so that it can return to the *prima materia*, the original substance from which the universe is believed to have been made (Abraham 1998:153; Aristotle 2003:35). It is in this fluid mass, also referred to as the “mercurial bath”, where the male (sulphur) and female (*argent vive*) seeds are united and die (Eliade 1978:161). Their soul departs from them, and what remains is the slaughtered body of the metal. The bright metal literally turns into a formless black mass, a “stinking corruption” within the alchemical vessel (Linden 2003:16) that is described as “the vilest and meanest of

things” (*The Sophic Hydrolith* 1893 cf. 1678:[sp]). It has no apparent worth, except to the alchemist who will resurrect it into a new form.

As Sir Isaac Newton explains (in Abraham 1998:153) “*Materia prima* is that which has been stripped of every form by putrefaction so that the new form can be introduced, that is, the black matter in the regimen of Saturn”. Saturn is an alchemical code name for the *prima materia*: the primeval matter from which the *lapis* is formed (Abraham 1998:178). As a planetary ruler, Saturn has held a sinister character. Long seen as the coldest and slowest of the planets, it is associated with old age, poverty and death (Panofsky 1972:77; Roob 2005:19). Saturn thus embodies melancholia, a state of sluggish and gloomy temperament (Panofsky 1972:76). Often he is depicted carrying a sickle or scythe, which acts as a signifier of the mythic castration<sup>17</sup> as well as agricultural reaping (Graves 1975:37). Saturn, in his association with the Greek Cronos, came to embody the idea of “Father Time” (through the association with Chronos/Time), and the scythe migrated into a symbol of impending death. Saturn thus becomes the “reaper who cuts down all in his path” (Abraham 1998:178), and endures in contemporary consciousness as the symbolic “Grim Reaper”. However, if the scythe or sickle is a lingering agrarian symbol, then Saturn, Cronos, “Father Time” is not simply to be understood as a symbol of utter destruction. Rather he is an embodiment of the universal cycle of procreation and death, the “cosmic continuity” of the mythic birth-death ritual. He is simultaneously known as both Destroyer and as Revealer: Time who devours as he creates (Panofsky 1972:74,82). He is the “Master of the Balance”, as Mercia Eliade (1978:162) explains. Saturn, as the *prima materia*, is the symbol of life and death eternally intertwined. It is the alchemist Paracelsus (qtd in Eliade 1978:154) who declares that “He who would enter the Kingdom of God must first enter with his body into his mother and there die... [The whole world must] enter into its mother [i.e. return to the womb]”. This is because it is in the *prima materia*, the *massa confusa*, the *abyssus*, where eternity is attained. It is for this reason that the *prima materia* is often called “mother earth” in alchemical jargon. It is named “chaos” in reference to the desolate beginnings of creation. At the same time it is also referred to as “buried treasure” (Abraham 1998:156): the wellspring of the immortal *lapis*.

Of all the alchemical symbolism present in the *Harry Potter* films, death and putrefaction are the most pervasive. For example, at the end of *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), Harry Potter is transported to a graveyard, the domain of death and decay. It is in this “black” place that Harry is trapped by Voldemort’s servant, Peter Pettigrew, and forced to partake in the “rebirthing” of Voldemort. His temporary prison is a stone monument marking a gravestone (see Figures 5 & 6). The monument is sculpted after the Angel of Death, a winged symbol of

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<sup>17</sup> Saturn (later related to Cronos) usurped his father Uranus’s throne and emasculated him through castration with a sickle (Graves 1975:37).

fleeting time with the sickle of reaping in its right hand. When Harry Potter is imprisoned in this statue, he is literally “embraced by death” and it is the shaft of the angel’s scythe that is held at his neck.



**Figure 5**

*Saturn as the Angel of Death (Newell 2005).*



**Figure 6**

*Harry Potter trapped (Newell 2005).*

Thus the darkest passage of Harry’s quest is initiated in the bosom of Saturn, the Grim Reaper. At this moment Voldemort is reborn through the use of a Dark Magic ritual and some of Harry’s own blood. Voldemort’s foetid, foetal appearance prior to his rebirth into a proper body is a vulgar reminder of the matrix of the *prima materia*. He starts the ceremony as an abhorrent homunculus<sup>18</sup> (Figure 7), but his immersion into the cauldron strips him of his old form and he

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<sup>18</sup> Homunculus: “a small, diminutive person; a dwarf; a symbol for the philosophical child or infant, the philosopher’s stone. The alchemists believed that it was possible to create little creatures in the image of man by artificial means in the womb of the alembic” (Abraham 1998:102).

returns to a mature shape (Figure 8). The *black* cauldron into which he is immersed becomes a perverse “mercurial bath”.



**Figure 7**

*Voldemort before his rebirthing* (Newell 2005).



**Figure 8**

*Voldemort's rebirthing* (Newell 2005).

The blood that fuels this ritual is taken from Harry Potter by force. Symbolically, Harry's bleeding is his mutilation: he undergoes the “destruction and deforming” of the black stage so that he can be reduced to a symbolic *prima materia* himself. His darkest moments of *nigredo* begin, and in the following novel, *The Order of the Phoenix*, all of Harry's preconceptions and insecurities are revealed. He is angry, self-centred, and the “impurities” of his personality begin to surface. If anything, *The Order of the Phoenix* is the *nigredo* book of the series, and it is initiated by the events that conclude *The Goblet of Fire*, highlighted through the symbolic presence of Saturn.

The process of putrefaction eventually transforms the matter into a disfigured black mess that forms at the bottom of the alchemist's vessel: a physical body that is broken and beaten. It is black and putrid because all of its impurities have been revealed and its matter stripped of form, just as Harry Potter is stripped of all the things he holds dear in *The Order of the Phoenix*. His "superiority" to his friend Ron is in question because Ron, and not he, was chosen as a prefect. The school that always offered refuge from his adopted family becomes a place of frustration and loathing when the Ministry of Magic sends Dolores Umbridge to teach classes and prevent him from speaking the truth. The headmaster he desperately wants to speak to is avoiding him. Everyone questions the validity of his accounts, and at the end he loses the only remaining "family" that he has: his godfather Sirius Black. Harry Potter is emotionally reduced to nothing, torn apart, and his "image" dismembered. He is like the metal that undergoes the violent turmoil of *nigredo* to be returned to the "formlessness and void" (*Genesis 1.2*, Stern 1998:1) at the beginning of creation. As Nicolas Flamel (1624:[sp]) writes, the "compound begins to rot and dissolve into powder, less than the Atoms of the Sun". This congealed mass is *Terra Foetida*, or "stinking earth" (Flamel 1624:[sp]), a dead body long since deprived of soul and spirit that has undergone incredible violence. The harrowing process is recalled in the vision of the alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis (2003:51):

I am Ion, the priest of the sanctuary, and I have survived intolerable violence. For one came headlong in the morning, dismembering me with a sword, and tearing me asunder according to the rigour of harmony. And flaying my head with the sword which he held fast, he mingled my bones with my flesh and burned them in the fire of the treatment, until I learnt by the transformation of the body to become spirit.

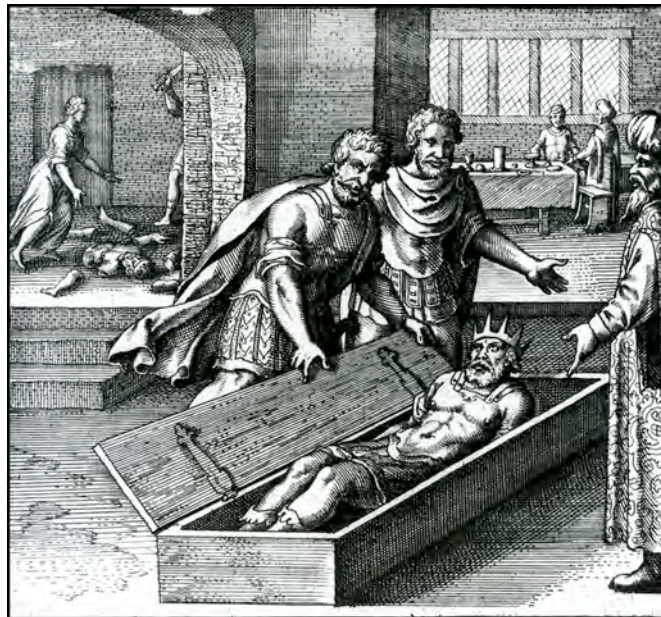
This description recounts the Dionysian and Osirian cults of Greece and Egypt, who acknowledged the importance of the death and dismemberment of the vegetative deity (Roob 2005:23). In Egyptian mythology, Osiris symbolises the mythic "seed" that enters the ground to die before he is reborn each year at the flooding of the Nile river (Witt 1971:37). According to legend, Osiris reigned as a king on earth before he was betrayed by his brother Set. He was trapped inside a coffin and eventually his body was dismembered, his numerous limbs scattered abroad. It was his sister and wife, Isis, who found all of his lost limbs and reassembled them. She then hovered over his reconstituted body and engaged in a necrophilic union with her husband, the fruit of which was the divine child Horus.<sup>19</sup> Osiris is resurrected with the aid of his wife Isis who, in the form of a bird, used her wings to blow wind (which is akin to spirit) back into his person (Budge 1973a:62-99; Fraser 2003:257-263; Klossowski de Rola 1997:103; Roob

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<sup>19</sup> The child Horus is in a sense the reborn aspect of his father. He is the expression of perpetual renewal, the "Lord of Eternity" (Zábkar 1983:120), the "old man who renews his youth" (Pierret 1885:268-269). They are two persons but one God, co-substantial and born or reborn of the same womb: Isis. The son is the reigning king, while the father represents the deceased king (Leach 1976:20). Isis is subsequently also known as "the widow [who] marries her son" (Jung 1989:19).



2005:215; Witt 1971:37). The reborn Osiris becomes the Egyptian god of the underworld, the afterlife and resurrection. His mutilation and resurrection are mentioned in Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (Figure 9) and highlight one of the fundamental premises of alchemy: that "The dissolution of the material body gives up its elements to metamorphoses" (*Papyrus 3377*, Louvre, qtd in Pierret 1885:271). As the writer of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (qtd in Roob 2005:215) declares, "Know, my son, that this our stone [the *lapis*]... is composed of four elements. It must be divided and its limbs taken apart... and then transformed into the nature that is within it".



**Figure 9**

*Dolo Typhon Osyridem trucidat, artisque illius Hinc inde dissipat, sed hos collegit Isis inclyta* (By treachery Typhon slays Osiris and scatters his limbs abroad, but majestic Isis reassembles them). From M. Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, Emblema XLIV, Frankfurt, 1618 (Klossowski de Rola 1997:93).

Osiris was consequently also called "The Great Black" in reference to the ritual death and rebirth of the crop, but more specifically in reference to the black silt deposits of the Nile marshes (Witt 1971:44). Egypt, incidentally, derived its name from these silt deposits. It was commonly known as the "country of dark soil" and perceived as the heartland of alchemy. In Arabic the dark country was known as *Khem*, and the alchemical arts that it propagated as *Al Khem*, giving rise to the Western term "alchemy" (Read 1933:252). Osiris's title of "The Great Black" lends itself to the dark *nigredo* of alchemy, even if that was not its original signification.

The bodily mutilation of the symbolic Osiris echoes the agony of Harry's own trials. Harry Potter encounters Voldemort twice during his great *nigredo*: once at the end of *The Goblet of*



*Fire*, and once at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix*. In both instances he undergoes extreme agony. In *The Goblet of Fire* (Rowling 2000:573) his torture is described as follows:

Voldemort raised his wand, and before Harry could do anything to defend himself, before he could even move, he had been hit again by the Cruciatus curse. The pain was so intense, so all-consuming, that he no longer knew where he was... white-hot knives were piercing every inch of his skin, his head was surely going to burst with pain; he was screaming more loudly than he'd ever screamed in his life...

At the end of *The Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling 2003:719-720, emphasis added), Harry Potter is possessed by Voldemort, and the occupancy of his body causes him extreme discomfort:

Then Harry's scar burst open and he knew he was dead: it was pain beyond imagining, pain past endurance... Blinded and dying, every part of him screaming for release, Harry felt the creature use him again... Let the pain stop, thought Harry... let him kill us... end it, Dumbledore... *death is nothing compared to this...*

The symbolic pain and violence, as well as the dissolution of his ego, is essential to Harry's progression. The *prima materia* is "identical to the substance which constitutes the soul in its original pure state" (Abraham 1998:155). In the esoteric work of alchemy the labour of the *nigredo* is to return the soul to this original state and strip it of its corrupt and rigid thought and form. The old habits of being can be removed and the soul regresses to its original state where it can finally be impressed upon by the divine spirit (Abraham 1998:155). The symbolic "destruction" of Harry Potter makes of him a blank slate upon which his ultimate destiny can be imprinted.

In each of the Harry Potter novels, the protagonist undergoes such a stage of *nigredo*, entering a "dark prison" (Marshall 2001:285) of scrutiny, self-pity or self-doubt, where all of his prejudices and unsound habits are highlighted. In confronting and resolving these issues he is able to purify his character, in a manner of speaking. Typically, Harry's moment of revelation occurs toward the end of the novel, after he has faced a symbolic death in some form of subterranean encounter. In *The Goblet of Fire*, for example, Harry slumps when he finds that he has been entered, against his knowledge, into the dangerous but prestigious Triwizard Tournament. All the students appear to believe that he somehow managed to bypass the stringent security measures and enter himself as an underage wizard. Perceived as an attention-seeker, Harry faces a difficult battle against the prejudice of his fellow students. He is obsessed with everyone's opinion of him, and even his relationship with his best friend, Ron Weasley, becomes strained as a result.

At the end of *The Goblet of Fire*, after his encounter with Voldemort in the graveyard, Harry's opinion is markedly different. Having passed through and survived a symbolic death, he again

notices that students are whispering about him, yet his reaction is illuminating: “He guessed that many of them had believed Rita Skeeter’s article about how disturbed and possibly dangerous he was. Perhaps they were formulating their own opinions about how Cedric had died. *He found he didn’t care much*” (Rowling 2000:622, emphasis added).

### 3.2.2. *Sirius Black and the Nigredo*

While these events are important in establishing the primacy of the *nigredo* symbolism within the *Harry Potter* series, such symbolism is not restricted to narrative events, graveyard scenes, or spectacular subterranean duels. At the point where Harry seems to be most overwhelmed with the unfairness of his situation in *The Goblet of Fire*, it is his godfather Sirius Black who magically approaches him from the comforting hearth of the Gryffindor common room:

Sirius’ head was sitting in the fire... [and Harry’s face broke] into the first smile he had worn for days... Sirius looked at him, eyes full of concern, eyes which had not lost the look that Azkaban had given them – that deadened, haunted look (Rowling 2000:290-291).

This description couldn’t be more apt as Sirius Black, with his deathly eyes, is named for the dark, *nigredo* stage of alchemy. The symbolism with which Rowling suffuses Sirius Black is indicative of death and transcendence, and he is the perfect herald of alchemical *nigredo* in her novels. As a symbolic character, his signification is extensive, ranging from mythology to alchemy and even astrology. While each of these themes is important, it is not prudent to elaborate upon them all here. Rather, the present discussion facilitates the reader to understand the predominant symbolism of Sirius Black as a signifier for the *nigredo* stage of alchemy. Subsequent discussion of the astrological symbolism of Sirius Black is left until Chapter Seven, where it is examined within its proper context.

For now it is only essential to mention that Sirius Black is named after the star Sirius, which is the brightest star on the horizon. The star Sirius is commonly known as the “Dog-star” as it was often believed to accompany Orion across the night sky. The name is derived from the Greek *seirios*, meaning “bright, hot, burning” (Long 1984:257-259). Thus Sirius was believed to usher in the traditional “Dog-days”, a time of intense heat in the northern hemisphere. According to Long (1984:256), “It is a time of the year when dogs go mad and snakes go blind, eggs become addled or hatch crazy chickens”. The fact that Sirius Black is an *animagus* and can transform himself into the shape of a large black dog is an indication of his name and symbolic function.

Throughout world mythologies the dog has been associated with death and the afterlife. Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant (1996:296) assert that “There cannot be a mythology that does

not associate a dog, be it as Anubis, T'ien k'uan, Cerberus, Xolotl or Garm, with Death, Hell, the Underworld or with those invisible realms ruled by the deities of Earth or Moon". Rowling uses this mythology to good effect and in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* the symbolic black dog is written as a sinister omen of death that torments Harry Potter into suspecting impending doom. It is only at the end of the novel that Rowling reveals that the black dog is in fact his godfather, Sirius Black, and that rather than threatening him, the dog seeks to find him, help him, and reveal certain truths.

Such an idea of a hybrid man-dog is found in Egyptian mythology in the form of the awful god Seker. He had the face of a dog and the eyebrows of a man. Seker was originally a personification of inert matter who sat enthroned in utter blackness and night (Budge 1999:170-171), reminiscent of the black matter in the *prima materia*. He later became Death incarnate, the guardian of darkness, and he was described as "he who feedeth on the dead, who watcheth at the Bight of the lake of Fire, who devoureth the bodies of the dead" (Budge 1973b:146).

Similarly, the Egyptian deity Anubis, often regarded as the son of Osiris and Nephthys, is commonly depicted with a human body and the head of a dog. He was the guard and protector of the dead during their time of judgement, and the "Embalmer" *par excellence* (Budge 1999:182). Incidentally he was also regarded as the patron of orphans and lost souls, so it is symbolically appropriate that Sirius is named the godfather of the orphaned Harry Potter. Anubis was the symbolic guardian of the veil of death – like the Greek Cerberus – and was said to walk between the shadows of light and dark. As such he represents the darkest part of the night or the earliest dawn (Budge 1999:182). Anubis, like most mythic dogs or dog-gods, was a *psychopomp*: a guide of departed souls to the land of the dead. The function of the *psychopomp* is critical to the ideology of alchemy. The Greek deity Hermes and the Egyptian deity Thoth were both considered to be *psychopomps* in their respective cultures, and as such both became associated with travel across the limen of death; they were seen as guides of the material and spiritual nature, and considered as the byways and boundaries of consciousness (Fideler 1993:228; Wake 1870:204). Their syncretic amalgamation in late antiquity formed *Hermes Trismegistus*, a creative demiurge eventually transported to the position of founder of the alchemical art (Fowden 1993:22).

The mythic dog, as *psychopomp*, is intimately involved in the cycle of death and rebirth, and as such has been linked to the vegetative deity. Sir James Frazer (2003:353-354) recalls that in France, Germany and the Slavic countries it was common to conceive of the corn spirit as a wolf or dog. In Verdun the culmination of reaping was called "killing the Dog". In other places peasants would say that the "mad Dog is in the corn" when winds passed over the field, while the Romans had a habit of sacrificing red puppies in the spring; either to avert the baleful

influence of Sirius, the Dog-star, or to enact a sacrifice on behalf of the Barley-mother (Graves 1999:376).

In Egypt the star Sirius was connected to the annual inundation of the Nile river (Van der Waerden 1949:8), an event which symbolised the birth of a new crop and a figurative rebirth from the deathly presence of the arid wilderness. Sirius therefore heralds the arrival of “The Great Black”: Osiris as the dark silt of the Nile marshes. This agricultural event was so important to the Egyptian way of life that the civil calendar commenced with the heliacal rising of Sirius (on the first day of the month of Thoth) (Cunningham 1915:369). Sirius, or Sothis as it was called in Egypt, was associated with the “cosmic year”, a period of 1461 years<sup>20</sup> that marked the union of the civil and the Sirian calendars. It is not a coincidence that the phoenix, the prime metaphor for the mythic cycle of death and rebirth, is sometimes recorded as having a life cycle of exactly 1461 years (Nicklin 1900:147). Just as the star Sirius moves across the horizon, ascending and descending in relation to the sun, so the phoenix immolates itself in the hope and knowledge of renewed life. Both are indicative of the cosmic cycles of reincarnation.

The Egyptians also maintained that Sothis, or Sirius, was the soul and star of Isis. Stars were believed to be divine spirits around which the souls of the blessed would collect (Budge 1973b:250). Many pyramids were built with shafts that lined up with Sirius around the time of their construction (Marshall 2002:145-6). The star was of particular importance because it was believed to be the destination of human souls after death, as well as a passage to a heightened spiritual state. Isis, and concomitantly Sirius, was thus a symbolic place of refuge from death. Together they symbolised its transcendence and the progression of life away from its corporeal restrictions on planet earth. It is for this reason that Sirius came to be associated with the “Duat” in the sky (Budge 1973a:107). The Duat was a type of Egyptian Hades, a region to which the dead departed. It was believed to be formed from the body of Osiris (Brown 1923:132).

The tragic passing of Sirius Black through the enigmatic *veil* in the Department of Mysteries at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix* is clearly no accident. The veil is symbolic of the progression away from earth towards the cosmos and the afterlife. It is the hymen between this world and the next, between earth and cosmos, and between the physical reality and the spiritual reality. Traditionally, a veil conveys the meaning of the separation of one thing from another. To pass through the veil is to gain access to hidden or revealed knowledge (Chevalier &

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<sup>20</sup> The Egyptian calendar used 365 days unlike the Julian calendar which uses approximately 365¼ days. Thus every year the Egyptian calendar was short by almost a quarter of a day. The Sothic year, however, marked by the rising of Sothis and the inundation of the Nile, was more or less equal to the Julian calendar year owing to the processional movement of Sirius. This means that 1460 Sirian years were equal to 1461 calendar years, owing to the loss of ¼ of a day for each calendar year. These two systems of measuring time would thus come back into alignment every 1461 (365¼ x 4) years (Cunningham 1915:369).

Gheerbrant 1996:1062). The death of Sirius Black occurs at the time of great revelation: the Prophecy pertaining to Harry Potter and Voldemort is released and Harry becomes aware of his destiny. Sirius Black, the *psychopomp*, has passed through the very limen that he symbolises: the shadow area between one reality and another.

If the star Sirius attracts the souls of the righteous towards its cosmic glow, then it is no accident that it forms the centrepiece of Rowling's *nigredo* symbolism. During the *nigredo* the body of the metal is destroyed and at the same time its soul and spirit are released and rise to the top of the alchemist's vessel. Soul and spirit are pulled away from the blackened body, the "foetid earth" and ascend as volatile vapours, where they are united together and await the purification of the body (Abraham 1998:135,188). As mentioned above, *The Order of the Phoenix* is the great *nigredo* book of the series, and it is very much Sirius' book. From the arrival of the Dementors at the opening, and the events at the House of "Black", all the way to Sirius' sudden departure at its closure, Rowling has ensured that *The Order of the Phoenix* is satiated with references to death, dissolution and blackness. It is a lugubrious and difficult read, culminating in a spectacular confrontation between Harry Potter, Dumbledore and Voldemort, where Harry is left thinking "death is nothing compared to this [pain]... And I'll see Sirius again" (Rowling 2003:720). The passage that follows is pertinent:

And as Harry's heart filled with emotion, the creature's coils loosened, the pain was gone; Harry was lying face down on the floor, his glasses gone, shivering as though he lay upon ice, not wood (Rowling 2003:720).

The floor feels like ice because Harry has just undergone the heat of tremendous tribulation. It is by no means his final tribulation, for that occurs in *The Deathly Hallows*. However, this is the distress that marks the end of his greater period of *nigredo*. The mention of "ice" is also the symbolic introduction of water into the narrative. Harry is "put on ice" metaphorically, and in the alchemical sense this marks the beginning of his washing and cleansing. The introduction of cleansing moisture heralds the beginning of the alchemical *albedo*, the next phase of the *opus alchymicum* (Granger 2007a:67). The death of Sirius has marked the culmination of Rowling's *nigredo*, and the final impurities in Harry's character are revealed when he is forced to confront Dumbledore, the death of Sirius, and the truth of himself back at the Headmaster's office in Hogwarts.

### 3.3. Alchemical Albedo

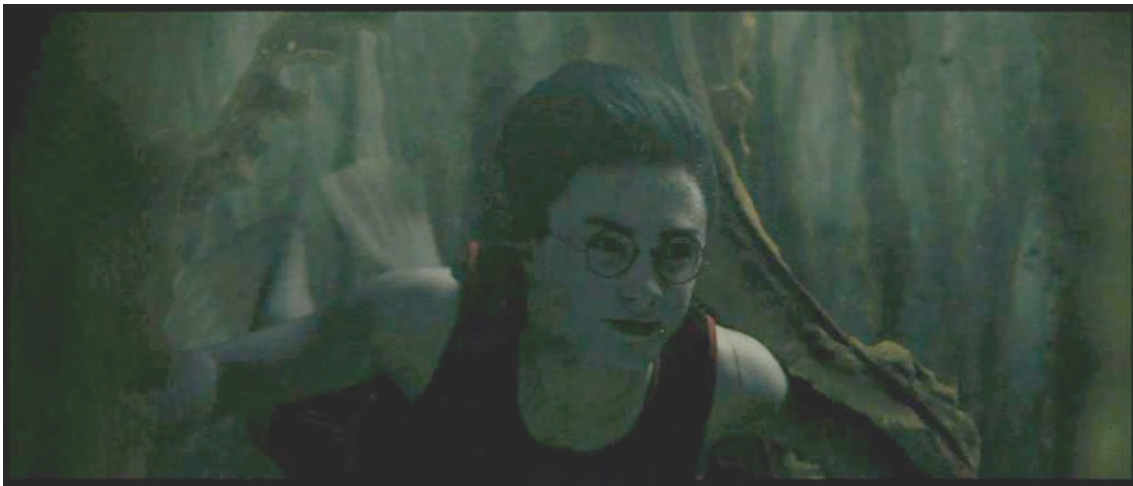
The second stage of the alchemical work is often referred to as the *albedo*. The term is derived from the Latin *albus*, meaning “white” or “resplendent”. This reveals the origin of Albus Dumbledore’s name, and it is clear that he is named for this stage (Granger 2003:[sp]). Just as *The Order of the Phoenix* was Sirius’s book, so its successor, *The Half-Blood Prince*, is the symbolic announcement of the death of Albus Dumbledore. The book starts with the premonition of his death: “his hand was blackened and shrivelled; it looked as though his flesh had been burned away” (Rowling 2005:50). It ends with his funeral at Hogwarts and the resolution that Harry Potter must now continue his quest without his mentor.

It is Albus Dumbledore who dictates the pace of *The Half-Blood Prince*, choosing when to reveal choice details about Voldemort’s past to Harry Potter. Correspondingly, the alchemical *albedo* is the stage that marks the beginning of enlightenment and revelation: “The clear moonlight of albedo leads the adept out of the black nights of the soul (the *nigredo*) into the dawning of consciousness” (Abraham 1998:5). Hence, it is appropriate that in *The Half-Blood Prince* Albus Dumbledore himself instructs Harry Potter. These “lessons” teach Harry about Voldemort’s history and personality. They are a glimpse into what is required of him, a dawning realisation of the giant task that still lies before Harry Potter.

In alchemy the *albedo* occurs when the blackened matter left by the dissolution of *nigredo* is washed to a resplendent white, either in the mercurial waters or through a purifying fire. The white signifies that the matter has become pure and spotless (Abraham 1998:4-5), “For when the cloud-sent waters flow thereon | It cleanses every dark and earthy stain” (*The Poem of the Philosopher Theophrastus Upon the Sacred Art* 2003:66). The whitening of the body indicates that it has been “spiritualised” (i.e. volatilised), for it is the aim of alchemy to “make of the body a spirit and of the spirit a body” (Burckhardt, qtd in Granger 2003:[sp]). The fetid smell that marked the decaying body is replaced with a pleasant fragrance.

Given the context of purification and washing that defines the *albedo*, it is hardly surprising to find that Rowling forces Harry Potter into an obligatory “bath” on more than one occasion. The most noteworthy incident of this is during *The Goblet of Fire*. Not only does the second task of the Triwizard Tournament require that Harry be submerged for an hour beneath Hogwarts Lake, but the clue to the challenge is only revealed to him after he takes a bath in the prefects’ bathroom (Rowling 2000:402) (see Figures 10 & 11).





**Figure 10**

*Harry swims in Hogwarts Lake during the second trial of the Triwizard Tournament (Newell 2005).*



**Figure 11**

*Harry in the prefects' bath with Moaning Myrtle (Newell 2005).*

Harry has undergone a *nigredo* during *The Goblet of Fire*: he is taught about the unforgivable curse that left him scarred and his parents dead; his name is submitted for the dangerous Triwizard Tournament by an outside party; and nobody believes his account that he did not forge the entry himself in his search for fame and “immortality”. The bath that Harry takes in the prefects’ bathroom is his symbolic cleansing. Incidentally, a restless spirit named Moaning Myrtle “accompanies” him during his bath. Myrtle is an evergreen shrub that has aromatic leaves and white flowers. Because it is evergreen, the myrtle became a “token of the resurrection of the dead King of the year” (Graves 1999:254), or in alchemical terms the rebirth of the dying metal. Moaning Myrtle thus symbolises the replacement of the stench of death with

a pleasant fragrance. Like the “winter-scene” of the Yule Ball that preceded Harry’s immersion into the bath (Figure 12) and the white marble floor of the bathroom, the white flowers of the myrtle plant resound the theme of purification.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 12**  
*The Yule Ballroom* (Newell 2005).

Just as each of the seven novels has a period of darkness and *nigredo*, so each novel has a representative period of washing and cleansing, either symbolised by copious references to “white” or “silver” objects and people, or else through the introduction of water into the narrative. The most prominent of these incidents occurs in The Forest of Dean during *The Deathly Hallows*. Harry Potter spots a “*silver-white* doe, *moon-bright* and *dazzling*” (Rowling 2007:298-299, emphasis added) which leads him to a “small, frozen pool”. It is here that he discovers the Sword of Gryffindor, lying at the bottom of the pool, glinting like “a great silver cross” (Rowling 2007:299). Harry submerges himself in the pool and is symbolically “baptised” in its icy water.

The *albedo* stage of alchemy is usually associated with all things pure, white or silver, “because the matter has attained the perfect state of receptivity, ready to be imprinted by form” (Abraham 1998:5). The product of the *albedo* is the White Elixir, which “melts, tinges and coagulates... imperfect metals into silver” (Kelly, qtd in Abraham 1998:5). Of the White Elixir Nicolas Flamel (1624:[sp]) writes that it will “unite unto himself every pure and metallic nature, changing it into his own most fine silvery nature, rejecting all that is impure, strange and Heterogeneous, or of another kind”. Hence images of the moon (Luna), the white queen, Diana,

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<sup>21</sup> Astute readers may also note that it is Parvati Patil that accompanies Harry Potter to the Yule Ball. The mythic Parvati is the female consort of the god Shiva: the symbolic pillar of fire who created the world (Storl 2004:150). As such, her union with Harry Potter (however temporary and contrived) symbolises the joining of the male and female seeds in the mercurial waters.

the virgin, the dove, snow, the swan, the white lily (Harry's mother's name) ash, and silver are all evoked as images of the *albedo*.

The *albedo* is also the stage where the soul, which was separated from the body during *nigredo*, is able to become conscious of its own true nature. In separating from the body, the soul is freed of any corporeal attachments and the natural forces of matter. It is "dead" to the world, and enlightenment may begin to dawn upon it. It becomes aware of the difference between the natural and the spiritual man, and seeks to be unified with the spirit and become illuminated by it (Abraham 1998:38). Hence during the *albedo* another form of union occurs: between soul and spirit, both of which have ascended to the top of the alchemist's vessel during the *nigredo*. This alchemical wedding is often depicted as a union of Sol and Luna (Sun and Moon), but it is not yet the *great* alchemical wedding: the reuniting of the combined soul and spirit with the body. This occurs during the next stage of the alchemical work: the *rubedo*.

### 3.4. Alchemical Rubedo

By the end of the *albedo* stage, the washed body of the metal is ready to be resurrected. The work of purification has been completed, and now the new form needs only to be manifested for the world to see. It is like the mythic tale of Osiris, whose dismembered body is reformed, cleansed and given the breath of life: "Thy sister Isis comes to thee... She is seen giving movement to thy limbs; she guides *moisture* into thee; she gives thee *breath*" (Pierret 1885:272, emphasis added). Breath is a synonym for wind and spirit; so the work of Isis mirrors the work of the alchemist. The reconstituted, purified body of the metal is at its most receptive; it is matter which is waiting for the form of the spirit to be imprinted upon it. Thus the alchemist undertakes the *supreme chemical wedding*: the marriage of the body and the spirit, of the symbolic King and Queen. The eternal spirit is fixed (or crystallised) with the body and the *lapis* is born. Lyndy Abraham (1998:174) explains that "At this union, the supreme chemical wedding, the body is resurrected into eternal life. As the heat of the fire is increased, the divine red tincture flushes the white stone with its rich red colour". Jung (qtd in Marshall 2001:432) explains the importance of this process as follows:

[In the] state of 'whiteness' one does not live in the true sense of the word. It is a sort of abstract, ideal state. In order to make it come alive it must have 'blood', it must have what the alchemists called the *rubedo*, the 'redness' of life. Only the total experience of being can transform this ideal into a fully human mode of existence. Blood alone can reanimate a glorious state of consciousness in which the last trace of blackness is dissolved.

This is why the final stage of the *opus alchymicum* is called the *rubedo*. *Rubedo* is derived from the Latin word *rubeus*, meaning “red”. It is the name that Rowling has given to one of her most beloved characters: the half-giant Rubeus Hagrid (Granger 2003:[sp]). It is no accident that, when Harry Potter returns from his sacrificial “death” towards the end of *The Deathly Hallows*, it is Rubeus Hagrid who carries his resurrected body out of the forest and back to Hogwarts (Rowling 2007:582). Harry Potter’s own blood has been spilt in order to tincture the alchemical work. This symbolic act indicates that the final stage of the work is complete. Harry Potter has become the symbolic *lapis*. He has tasted death; his soul and the fragment of Voldemort’s soul that was lodged inside of him have left his body. Harry, however, *chooses* to return. His soul is reunited with its now pure body – the stench of Voldemort gone from his being. Death no longer has any hold on him because he has walked its precipice and returned with the knowledge that it need not be feared. This is his moment of true revelation, the “golden flowering” (Campbell 1974:255) within his mind. At the stage of the *rubedo* the “silvery moonlight and dawn light of the albedo phase develops into the golden illumination of the midday sun, symbolising the attainment of the philosopher’s stone, the attainment of the consciousness of God” (Abraham 1998:174). Harry knows that Voldemort can no longer harm anyone, because his (Harry’s) sacrifice protects them. He also knows that the Dementors that he had always feared, dark beings that leech the positive emotions from people, will not harm him: “They would not affect him now. The fact of his own survival burned inside him, a talisman against them, as though his father’s stag kept guardian in his heart” (Rowling 2007:583). The alchemical stag is called the *cervus fugitivus*: a symbol of the volatile *Mercurius*, highlighting his elusiveness and his fugitive nature (Abraham 1998:32). In order for the stag to be “keeping guard” in Harry’s heart, it symbolises that *Mercurius*, the ephemeral *lapis*, has been caught and fixed within the person of Harry Potter. The *lapis* is no longer a transitory goal but a crystallised reality in Harry’s “resurrected” body.

In certain texts the resurrected body, the *lapis*, is also called the Red Elixir. Nicolas Flamel (1624:[sp]) depicts it as a vermillion red, flying lion for it devours “every pure metallic nature... changing it into her true substance, into true and pure gold, more fine than that of the best mines”. The Red Elixir is a catalyst for perfection, and it is often called the “universal medicine” because it removes all disease and impurity from that which it touches: animal, vegetable or mineral. In removing disease, that which it touches becomes immortal: metals turn to gold, while the alchemist “drinks” of the Elixir of Life. He overcomes the duality within himself and accesses the eternal in the here and now. His spiritual salvation is ensured so death is no longer a spectre of finality.





**Figure 13**

*The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001).



**Figure 14**

*Fawkes the Phoenix* (Columbus 2002).

At the end of the Harry Potter novels, the protagonist is usually saved from his symbolic death in the presence of a symbol related to the *lapis* or the culmination of the *rubedo*. For example, in *The Philosopher's Stone*, it is the physical *lapis* itself (Figure 13) that is present. In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry is saved and healed by Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix. *The Sophic Hydrolith* (1893 cf. 1678:[sp]) calls the *lapis* "the glorious phoenix"; it is a symbol of renewal and resurrection. In the film of *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), the phoenix displays

its proud plumage of red and gold, the two colours associated with the *rubedo* and the two colours that adorn the banner of Gryffindor (Figure 14). It is also the Song of the Phoenix that helps Harry to focus during his wand battle with Voldemort at the end of *The Goblet of Fire*. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry is saved when he manages to produce a Patronus, an avatar of positive energy, to chase away the Dementors (Figure 15). The avatar takes the shape of a large white stag which is a symbol of the perfect, immortal soul (Delphinus [sa]:[sp]).



**Figure 15**

*The White Stag* (Cuaron 2004).

At the conclusion of this discussion of the stages of the alchemical work, it should be apparent that the alchemical *nigredo*, *albedo* and *rubedo* are present within each of Rowling's novels. The reader need only search for symbolic images that link to the colours black, white and red; to death, purification, salvation or resurrection. The overview given in this Chapter is hardly extensive. In similar fashion to the books, each of the *Harry Potter* films evokes images of the alchemical work. Rowling has written seven novels, and there will be seven films. Each narrative is another symbolic dissolution, another purification that Harry Potter must undergo. The *rubedo* phase manifests in each novel, however the final *rubedo*, the great resurrection, is only revealed at the series' end.

Rowling is aware that alchemy is not a simple process. The *lapis* is produced through "*solve et coagula*": repeated dissolution and crystallisation so that it is made as pure as it can possibly be. Subsequently the *lapis* does not "disappear" at the end of *The Philosopher's Stone*; it is perfected and raised inside of Harry Potter himself. As such, the *lapis* becomes a pervasive symbol throughout the novels and films and a strong signifier of the author's alchemical worldview and intent. If the manifestation of the true *lapis* is the end-goal of Rowling's novels, then it should also become the end-goal of each of the films. Any associated visual symbolism



should clearly indicate the underlying alchemical text, but may take liberties with how this alchemy is presented. Chapter Four opens the discussions on the representation of the *lapis* in the *Harry Potter* films, where the associated ideology is similar to and different from the novels, and how these transmutations of meaning occur.



## CHAPTER 4

### *A Signification in Stone*

#### 4.1. Introduction

Now that the theoretical foundations of alchemy have been laid down, it is possible to commence a detailed discussion of its central symbol: the *lapis*. It is the primary hypothesis of this study that alchemy is the metaphor *qua* metaphor of the *Harry Potter* films. All of the ideas and ideals of alchemy are crystallised into the symbolic *lapis* since it is the achievement of the alchemical goal. Given that the *lapis* is the “end” of the alchemist’s quest it may come to be seen as a simile for all of its mythology and ideology. The *lapis*, therefore, is not a simple symbol but rather a complex, multilayered icon of cultural beliefs, hopes and aspirations, however far estranged from contemporary thought. It acts as a symbolic crucible in which it refers not only to itself as a stone of immortality, but also to the mythologies that have given birth to it. Different cultures throughout history have projected their own spiritual and developmental needs upon the *lapis* while erasing or amending those of alternate cultures. The result is that the *lapis* is best viewed as a symbolic palimpsest. Like a palimpsest, the surface of its text is continuously being erased and new values written, yet all the time a trace of the old values remains. As a result, the *lapis* maintains traces of all the cultures and worldviews with which it has had contact. It becomes the unifying principle that harmonises particular cultural archetypes.

As the predominant symbol of Harry Potter’s transformation, the *lapis* becomes a potential signifying vehicle for Rowling’s particular view of cosmology and alchemy. This chapter addresses the transition of the *lapis* from a verbal to a visual symbol and the potential transmission of its embedded worldview from book to film. As such, an immediate issue of concern is whether or not Rowling’s interpretation and appropriation of alchemy is in agreement with the alchemical worldview presented by the *Harry Potter* films. It is incumbent on the

visual analysis of the *Harry Potter* films to establish “which” *lapis*, if any, is being represented. In other words, does the visual representation of symbols within the films support Rowling’s view of cosmology and alchemy, or does it add a new “layer” of meaning to the *lapis*?

Such a question is predicated upon a number of assumptions. The first assumption is that the filmmakers are aware of the alchemical mythology that suffuses Rowling’s narrative. As an alternative hypothesis it could be interpreted that such alchemical symbology is merely the by-product of developing a visual art form based on an alchemical narrative. Alchemical symbols may be present in the *Harry Potter* films simply because these symbols are important to the narrative, and not as a conscious decision to incorporate alchemical symbology. In response, this study reveals that particular visual alchemical symbols occur at strategic places in the *Harry Potter* films, for example in books, as murals, or within stained-glass artworks. It is important to note that these visual images are not directly described in Rowling’s novels, and that their presence highlights a conscious process of symbolic appropriation.

Developing from this train of thought, the second assumption is that the alchemical symbols within the *Harry Potter* films are a direct attempt at representing a specific mytheme and/or worldview. Hence the placement of symbols is not incidental, nor is it a general attempt at visualising some arbitrary view of alchemy that includes miscellaneous icons. Conversely, it could just as easily be assumed that while the presence of alchemical symbols is a conscious decision, their visual presence is merely the result of an awareness of alchemical themes and not necessarily tied to the promotion of its worldview. This study argues that the meaning of a number of the visual symbols is highly particular. They can be contextually interpreted to convey a deliberate meaning as opposed to a generalised interpretation of some archetypal theme. As such, the alchemical meaning of the films appears to be ideologically constructed as a negotiation with Rowling’s original texts.

The third assumption derived from this question is that there is potential for meaning and symbolism to be transmuted, as well as that the chain of signification can be transmitted across media and authors. In this instance, the signification of the *lapis* is transmitted from book to film through the negotiation of its meaning. Such a conclusion is held in place by a number of theoretical postulations. For example, it is the argument of hermeneutics that “a text means what its author intends but also necessarily means more, acquiring new meanings as readers apply it to new situations” (Knapp & Michaels 1987:50). In this context, the creation of the *Harry Potter* films represents an act of reading, cognition and interpretation. The films cannot be produced without some degree of engagement and interpretation of Rowling’s texts. Kastan (qtd in Brooks 2003:681) maintains that “the text itself never exists – that is, it never exists apart from the various materializations that have made it present”. The *Harry Potter* films represent a

materialisation of Rowling's ideas. They are simultaneously a negotiation, a summarisation, and a re-presentation of the text. Yet it should also be stressed that Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels represent a materialisation of alchemy, and that alchemy itself represents an interpretation and materialisation of world mythology. Latin European alchemy views "all religious myth and imagery as the cloak of a hidden allegory" (Klossowski de Rola 1997:16), an allegory that points to the manufacture of the *lapis philosophorum*.

As a consequence of this theoretical assumption, the *Harry Potter* films represent as much of a commentary on Rowling's text and on universal alchemy as this study does. Analysing the *lapis* in the *Harry Potter* films reveals how the hermeneutic process unfolds. Supplementary imagery is added to the core of Rowling's texts, simultaneously enhancing the meaning and further illuminating the mytho-cultural context. At an ideally integrated level of symbolisation, "prospective symbols create new meanings through the reappropriation of the meanings of the past. Under these conditions there is a dialectic between the comparison of myth... and commitment to a master myth" (Homans 1975:344). The *lapis* once again becomes an appropriate symbol, because Rowling is able to recontextualise it for a contemporary audience. No longer is its signification confined to the annals of history as an unbreachable plateau. It is the supposed function of hermeneutics to interact between the horizons of the past and present. The hermeneutician is a requisite interpreter, a mediator who "makes understandable that which is not understood, that which is *no longer* understandable" (Bahti & Szondi 1978:21). As Cathy Brooks (1982:44) contends, "The text is an other with its own horizon, standing with the interpreter in the stream of history... The goal of the dialectic is a fusion of horizons". By this view Rowling, in her creative function, is a hermeneutician, providing a contemporary reading of an ancient allegory. A similar relationship exists between the *Harry Potter* novels and films.

#### **4.2. Interpreting Rowling's Alchemy**

Because the creation of the *Harry Potter* novels represents a process of recontextualising the *lapis*, it is prudent to ask exactly what Rowling's alchemy signifies. The *Harry Potter* novels cannot represent a "chaste" *lapis* in the sense of belonging to the exact ideology of a particular history or historic alchemist. The reading of the *lapis* has been tainted by the perspectives of our contemporary age. Subsequently the best way to analyse the significance of the *lapis* in the *Harry Potter* novels is to consider the context of its appropriation.

It has already been explained that the *lapis* is pervasive throughout the *Harry Potter* novels, and that its signification extends beyond a literal expectation of an "Elixir of Life". Chapters Two and Three have described the *lapis* in broad mythological terms by focusing on agrarian culture

and common archetypes such as the vegetative deity and the love-death ritual. JK Rowling, however, has publicly stated that her novels deal with Christian themes (Adler 2007:[sp]). In light of this, her symbolic *lapis* ought to be read as a contemporary Christian mythological symbol. The “Stone of the Philosophers” is not merely a representation of the vegetative deity, but more specifically, a representation of the *cornerstone* of God’s temple, who is the Christ (*Ephesians 2.20*, Stern 1998:1460). The alchemist Angelus Silesius (qtd in Roob 2005:520) writes that the symbolic cornerstone – the Christ – *is* the gold tincture, the *lapis*, of the philosophers. The red stone is therefore a symbol of the passion of the Christ’s body and the blood of his salvation. In the words of Jesus Christ, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (*John 6.54*, Stern 1998:1338; Campbell 1974:252,260). These words have alchemical resonance. Harry Potter’s final sacrifice at the end of *The Deathly Hallows* mirrors the sacrifice of the Christ, and the titles which Rowling has bequeathed to her protagonist are nothing short of Messianic: “the boy who lived” (Rowling 1997:7), “the Chosen One” (Rowling 2005:43), and ultimately “the master of death” (Rowling 2007:577). This is not to say that Harry Potter is an intentional replacement of the Christian Messiah – the symbolism is more complex than this – but simply that in attaining the *lapis*, Harry Potter has materialised Rowling’s ideology that “love can save you from death and... that a sacrifice in the name of love can bring you back from it” (Adler 2007:[sp]).

Rowling’s perspective on the *lapis*, while tintured by Christian ideology, is a little more complex than a mere parallel between the spiritual *lapis* and Christ. As John Granger (2007a:50-51) reiterates, “Alchemy was the means, in conjunction with the mysteries of the Church (or temple or mosque – there are alchemies in each of the revealed traditions, East and West), that [man] could regain his lost capacity”. It was a means to “return fallen man to his Edenic perfection [i.e. his perfection before sin]” (Granger 2007a:50). Harry Potter is not born a perfect deity, nor does he need to become one in order to defeat Voldemort. It “isn’t a story of Harry’s perfection in the sense of his becoming godlike in order to defeat the Dark Lord” (Granger 2007a:97). Instead it is a story about Harry Potter becoming *like* the *lapis*, a spiritual androgyne with a capacity to love, who harmonises and unifies not only his own discordant beliefs, but also the wizarding community at large, in order to fight the scourge of evil.

The perspective is complicated even more when Rowling acknowledges that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is a “multifaith school” (Adler 1997:[sp]). Hogwarts functions as the alchemical *alma mater*, very literally a “bounteous mother” as the Latin term denotes. It is in the womb of Hogwarts that Harry Potter is “initiated” into the alchemical framework of the novels. There are seven years of magical study at Hogwarts, corresponding to the seven stages of the alchemical work and the seven steps of *solve et coagula*. Furthermore, the school is under the jurisdiction of a noted alchemist. Rowling (1997:77) is keen to record that the headmaster,

Albus Dumbledore, is or has been a practicing alchemist, famous for “his work on alchemy with his partner Nicolas Flamel” (Rowling 1997:77). The four houses, Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw, represent the interconnection of the four elements: fire, water, earth and air. When brought together under the banner of Hogwarts, the proximity of the four houses expresses the alchemical desire for a unification of the four elements. Subsequently, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry becomes an emblem of alchemical unity. Being a “multifaith school”, the universalist<sup>22</sup> banner which Rowling now raises over the institution strengthens the awareness that alchemy is a syncretic practice. In *The Half-Blood Prince*, Rowling (2005:541) unveils in spectacular symbolic fashion just how “universal” Hogwarts School is. She utilises the symbolism of the Tarot deck to illustrate that Hogwarts is built upon a foundation of unity and universalism.



**Figure 16**

*The Tower* (Wasserman 2005:125).

Chapter 27 of *The Half-Blood Prince* is entitled “The Lightning-Struck Tower”, yet there is no mention of lightning for the entire length of the chapter. In fact, Rowling makes a point of describing the “starry sky”, so the mention of lightning (and associated storm-clouds) in the title must have a purely symbolic function. The sixteenth major arcanum of the Tarot depicts a tower. Generally it is flesh-coloured, and its pinnacle is struck by a thunderbolt hurtled down from heaven. Figure 16 illustrates that the tower is not completely destroyed; only its “crown”

<sup>22</sup> The term “universalism” is commonly employed to describe a Christian theology where all of humankind will eventually be saved. It is not intended to indicate a pluralism or pure theological relativism. As this study utilises it, “universalism” indicates a theology that is willing to appreciate and incorporate disparate religious or mythic elements that parallel its own ideology. Hogwarts is a symbol of universalism because it does not explicitly teach Christian theology, however Harry Potter’s symbolically “Christian” destiny is still able to arise out of its “multifaith” setup.



or apex is damaged while two persons, with their arms outstretched, are thrown hastily to the ground. In *The Half-Blood Prince* Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore fly to the Astronomy Tower, which is the highest tower in Hogwarts Castle, because they have spotted the “Dark Mark”, a signature that Voldemort’s followers use to indicate their presence and the commission of a murder. In the Tarot, the Tower is a sign of destruction, and it is here that Dumbledore meets with death at the hands of Severus Snape. He is flung out of the tower “like a great rag doll, over the battlements and out of sight” (Rowling 2005:556). Harry Potter is the other symbolic body to be cast out of the tower: “Harry felt as though he, too, were hurtling through space” (Rowling 2005:557).

At a basic level, the Tower card portrays divine punishment against a building that is the colour of the human frame. It is not the entire tower which is destroyed, but only its pinnacle, the part that was intended to *complete the whole* (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1021). It is the human crown, with its *four* battlements that is cast down, four being the number of the cardinal points and of the elements. The fourth card of the Tarot deck is the *emperor*, who represents empire, dominion, rule, power and success (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996:353). The number of the Tower – sixteen<sup>23</sup> – is four squared, hence it is an expression of “absolute power, of complete and dynamic fulfilment” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1021). Given this context, the Tower card relates to the biblical Tower of Babel,<sup>24</sup> the symbol of human presumption, but also of human *unity*: “Look, the people are united, they all have a single language, and see what they are starting to do!” (*Genesis 11:6*, Stern 1998:10). In the biblical story the tower is never completed because God confounds the language of the builders. The Tarot Tower, however, is completed, and as Éliphas Lévi declares “Whenever the human race builds such a tower [as Babel], *the summit will be contested*” (2001:109, emphasis added).

The Tower card is commonly a symbol of the destruction of lies, preconceptions and false beliefs. It is the symbol of major change and revelation, and during the chapter entitled “The Lightning-Struck Tower”, Severus Snape is “revealed” as the killer of Albus Dumbledore, and (albeit falsely) the agent of the Dark Lord. It is doubtful that Rowling is trying to compare Hogwarts, the base of the tower, with Babylon itself, however the incorporation of this symbolism raises two pertinent issues. Firstly, Hogwarts is again identified as a site of *union* and the joining of forces. The four battlements of the crown highlight the union of the four elements. The death of Dumbledore brings the structure of Hogwarts itself into further disarray, and his departure is the symbolic destruction of its hierarchy. Secondly, the incorporation of the iconic Tower in the narrative expresses the syncretic nature of Rowling’s text. She is not afraid

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<sup>23</sup> Harry Potter is incidentally aged sixteen when these events occur.

<sup>24</sup> Aleister Crowley’s 1944 Tarot deck actually depicts an open mouth at the bottom right of the tower (Wasserman 2005:129), which symbolises the confounding of languages that occurred at Babel.

to employ “alternate” symbolic systems in order to establish her base Christian ideology.

While the iconography of the Tarot deck is pervasively mediaeval and mixed with Christian symbols, its origin is difficult to ascertain. It is not an exclusively Christian tradition, and its incorporation into Rowling’s symbolism highlights an awareness of auxiliary forms of signification. The Tarot represents the interaction of the most ancient set of world symbols, and was used for centuries as a medium for the transmission of occult teaching (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:969). Subsequently, with the Tarot “the theory of correspondence reaches its highest pitch... [the] aspirant approaches the universe with the request that light be shed on a certain subject and that true insights be derived from the apparently random patterns made by a series of archetypal images” (Wasserman 2005:119). The Tarot therefore epitomises the functioning of a syncretic system of symbols working towards a unified goal.

The same can be said of Hogwarts. It is a symbol of alchemical unity, but it is also the pinnacle of Rowling’s syncretic universalism. It is important to note that in alchemy the “tower” is a synonym for the furnace in which the alchemical work takes place. According to *The Golden Tract* (in Abraham 1998:204), the glass vessel in which the brother and sister (*Sol* and *Luna*) are captured is “situated in a strong tower, and surrounded with battlements and lofty walls”. Subsequently Hogwarts is the castle that fortifies the alchemical work and allows the heat of the symbolic furnace to work upon its students. If Hogwarts is the alchemical *alma mater*, then it symbolises a unified, universal alchemy, the product of a “multifaith” institution. Subsequently Rowling’s idea of the *lapis* is tied to such syncretic symbolism. Mercia Eliade (1978:168) declares that, “As was to be expected, the image of the Stone finally integrated all the magical beliefs”.

This integrated mystical perspective is highly evident in the European courts of the Renaissance era (see Harkness 1996:717). Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa<sup>25</sup> illustrates the marriage of Platonism, Hermetic literature, alchemy, astrology, divination and mythology with Christianity in his descriptions of the occult arts. Note his description of the magician:

A Magician doth not amongst learned men signifie a sorcerer, or one that is superstitious or devellish; but a wise man, a priest, a prophet; and that the Sybils were Migicianesses, [and] therefore prophecyed most cleerly of Christ; and that Magicians, as wise men, by the wonderful secrets of the world, knew Christ, the author of the world, to be born, and came first of all to worship him; and that the name of Magicke was received by Phylosophers, commended by Divines, and not unacceptable to the Gospel (Agrippa 1651a:[sp]).

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<sup>25</sup> Agrippa gets a mention in *The Philosopher’s Stone* (Rowling 1997:77,78) along with the alchemist Paracelsus. Both historical characters are depicted as famous wizards on collectable cards.

Agrippa's interpretation is similar to the intellectual and spiritual milieu that might exist at a "multifaith" school such as Hogwarts, even if "magic" is taught there as a mechanical exercise (Ostling 2003:6) rather than as a ceremonial rite or spiritual indoctrination. In Rowling's Christian universalism, magic is permitted because it is a means to expressing her ideology. Out of a framework of "Paganism", Rowling unveils her Christian iconography. Conservative Christianity that objects to the use of magic or the employment of occult imagery is sidelined, for as Rowling states "I go to church myself... I don't take any responsibility for the lunatic fringes of my own religion" (Adler 1997:[sp]).

It is this attitude which pervades the ideology embodied in Rowling's *lapis*. It appears that she accepts the syncretic nature of alchemy because she understands that the alchemist is the supreme "uniter", a chemical philosopher with a desire to overcome the divisions in nature, in humanity, and the rift between himself and the godhead. Conversely, fundamentalist theology may well be associated with segregation, nowhere more clearly seen than in the attitude of the Death Eaters who wish to "purify" the wizarding race at the expense of "lesser" persons. Therefore, just as the *lapis* is the harmony of the four elements and the union of the male and female seeds into an androgynous singularity, so it becomes a metaphor for a harmonious community.

As it relates to this study, the *lapis* is the symbolic unification of the visual signs within the films. All of the symbols that this study discusses are visual *cues* that highlight an aspect of the *lapis* and the alchemical process. The *lapis* becomes the highest axiom, the ultimate archetype or  $\alpha$ -sign within the *Harry Potter* films. It is the "goal" to which all the other lower-order signs refer. It contains within itself ideas about religion, cosmology, science, art and culture, all drawn together in a harmonious singularity. It is a higher-order of sign, comparable to the *meta-language* of which Roland Barthes speaks when he discusses the nature of cultural myth.<sup>26</sup> Hence the *lapis* is able to retain the idea that it is a "blood-red stone" (Rowling 1997:212) that makes gold and an Elixir of Life (here it functions as the signifier, whose meaning is derived from the lower-order sign), while it is also the symbol of unity, victory, the Christ and Harry Potter (the culminated signified). Thus all of the visual icons revealed in this study, whether signs of Egyptian or Greek mythology, medieval folklore, astrology, or alchemy, are signifiers of the *lapis*. They are *hybridised* into a new syncretic unity of meaning and purpose. This process is referred to as "visual hybridisation" and explains how the predominant symbols in the

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<sup>26</sup> In Roland Barthes's (1992:691) essay "Myth Today" he highlights the idea that myth itself is a meta-language: a semiological system constructed from a chain that existed before it. He calls it a "*second-order semiological system*" because "that which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second". He recalls to the reader that "the materials of mythic speech... how ever different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth". In other words, myth only wants to see a "sum of signs, a global sign". The mythic *lapis* works in the same way, assimilating the signs of theology, cosmology and other systems in order to establish its own significance as a universal panacea.

film may be amalgamated in a reference to a unified archetype. Such a definition assumes that the films are working within a syncretic framework that is dependent upon Rowling's novels themselves. Supplementary signs incorporated into the films that have no direct reference to the *Harry Potter* novels can be seen to work within the particular alchemical worldview that Rowling has provided, and this analysis forms the remainder of this chapter.

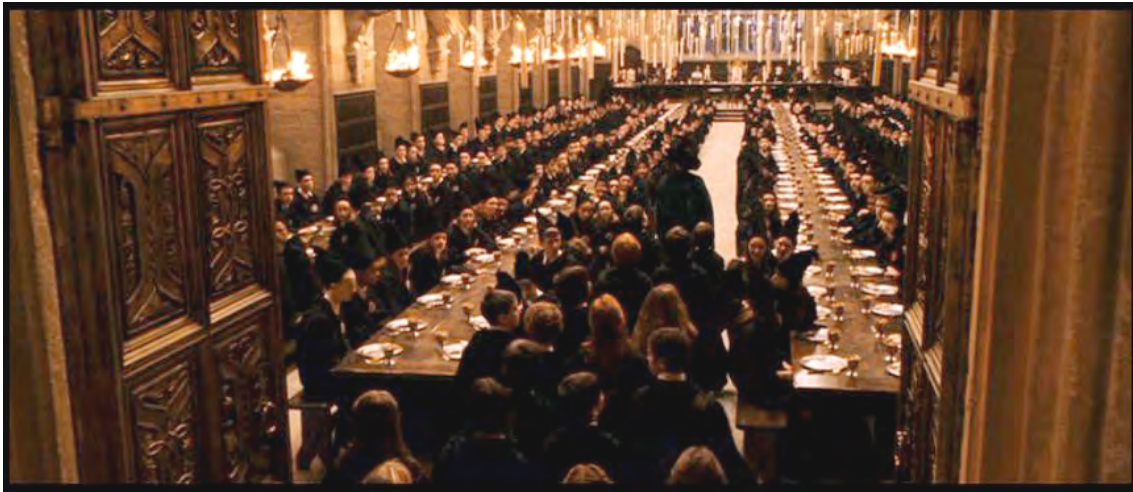
In summary then, the visual analyses undertaken in this chapter have two purposes: 1. To illustrate that the *Harry Potter* films are created with an awareness of alchemy and that the symbolism is not just incidental, and 2. To illustrate that supplementary visual icons used in the films are visual cues that point to the symbolic *lapis* as the archetypal sign of the series. In the undertaking of these two endeavours the theoretical migration of symbols from written text to film, and their subsequent reinterpretation, can be analysed.

### 4.3. Alchemical Imprints

Having considered the potential signification of the *lapis* in Rowling's novels, it is now possible to focus upon the transmission of this signification to the *Harry Potter* films. It is apparent that Rowling is passionate about the unificatory potential of the *lapis*, its ability to cross the great divisions of life, to heal the wounds of death, to annul the segmentation of racial profiling, and to bring the protagonist into a fuller understanding of himself. It can be argued that the *Harry Potter* films have taken this ideological premise and imprinted it upon the set design of Hogwarts Castle. The Great Hall at Hogwarts Castle is a prominent example of visual imagery within the *Harry Potter* films. It functions as the focal point of alchemical unity within the films, and since the same set is used throughout all five films (*The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001), *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuaron 2004), *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), and *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007)) its symbolism remains present throughout the series.

The Great Hall at Hogwarts Castle is one of the most pertinent and saturated symbolic arenas within the *Harry Potter* films. For this reason, any discussion of alchemical symbolism should start within this area of literal and symbolic unification. The Great Hall is a meeting place where all four of the houses are gathered together for meals, for announcements and other general activities. It is also one of the first rooms that Harry Potter and the audience are introduced to in *The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001) (Figure 17). Its grandeur and spirit of enchantment are intended to inspire and enthrall from the moment that the first year students enter through its vast wooden doors until they depart at the conclusion of their studies. There are antique illustrations painted on the walls, large busts of the four mascots of the four houses, and even

gargoyles that adorn its gothic expanse. Very few of these visual ornamentations are described in Rowling's novels, but they do emphasise the idea that Hogwarts School is a symbolic crucible of alchemical development and unity.



**Figure 17**

*Arrival at the Great Hall (Columbus 2001).*



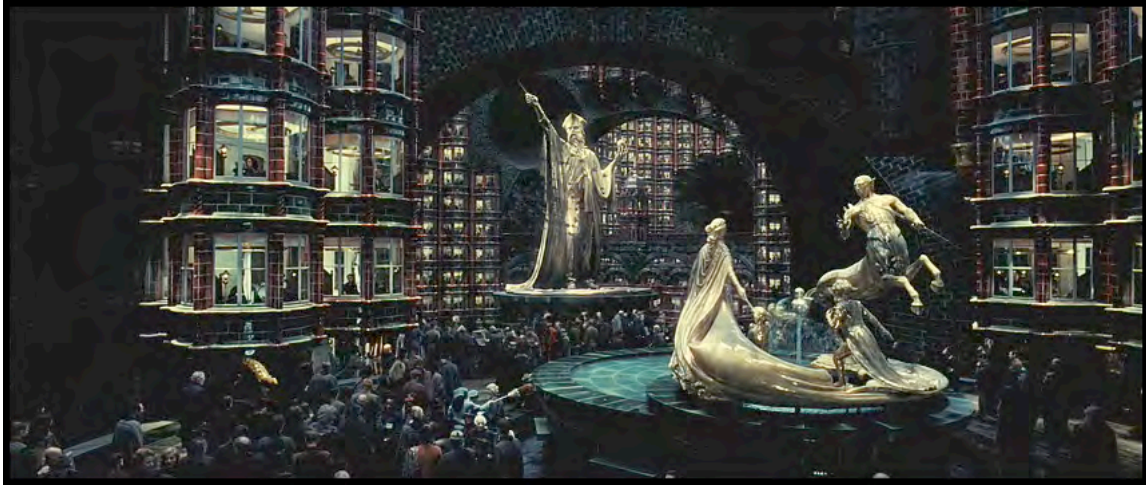
**Figure 18**

*The Hogwarts Emblem (Rowling 1997:3).*

The Great Hall represents the dissemination of the theme of alchemical unity from Rowling's novels to the *Harry Potter* films. Each of Rowling's novels contains an illustration of the Hogwarts School crest (Figure 18) on the title page. The school crest is comprised of a shield adorned with the mascots of the four houses. Clockwise from the top left corner of the shield these are: a lion for Gryffindor, a snake for Slytherin, a raven for Ravenclaw, and a badger for Hufflepuff. Beneath the shield is a scroll upon which is written the school motto: *Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus*, or "Never tickle a sleeping dragon". This crest symbolises the alchemical desire for unity and the reconciliation of the four elements into the *quintessence*. The four houses, when joined in support of one another and the school, are a microcosm of the unity



that is needed in the greater magical community. Just as there are four houses at Hogwarts there are four magical races within the novels: wizards (and witches), centaurs, goblins and house-elves. This need for unity among the four races is loosely depicted in a golden fountain located at the Ministry of Magic (Figure 19).



**Figure 19**

*Golden fountain in the Ministry of Magic showing the four magical races united around the water spout with a wizard on the left (Yates 2007).*



**Figure 20**

*General interior of the Great Hall showing the murals above the entrance as well as sculptures of the four house mascots as winged statues (Columbus 2001).*

It is therefore metaphorically appropriate that the Great Hall at Hogwarts should be adorned with images of alchemical unity. The *Harry Potter* films extend the idea of unity beyond the physical proximity of the four houses at the dining tables. The entire hall is filled with murals



depicting alchemical principles. Additionally, the mascots of the four houses that adorn the Hogwarts crest are re-imagined as large statues that emerge from the walls to occupy the visual space of the Great Hall (Figure 20). They are represented as winged beings, enhancing their connotation from mascot to guardian, from the terrestrial to celestial. These elemental principalities are of primary importance to Hogwarts and the novels. They overlook the students beneath them and watch over the entire expanse of the Great Hall. They are a reminder of the ancestral founders of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry: Godric Gryffindor, Salazar Slytherin, Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff, and the spirit of unity under which the school was established. While their symbolism is inferred from Rowling's novels, and school traditions of competing houses, they are the archetypes of alchemical unity.

#### 4.3.1. *The Unity of the Double Serpent*

This symbolism of unity is extended to the rest of the Great Hall. Above the large wooden doors through which the students enter there is a mural that depicts two serpents or dragons, one of which is winged (Figures 20 & 21). A similar image to this is found in a 17<sup>th</sup> century alchemical text from the *Theatrum chemicum Britannicum* (Figure 22), and illustrates the alchemical origin of the mural.

It is impossible to recount here all of the mythic connotations of the serpent. It has become a dichotomous symbol, regarded worldwide as the great regenerator and initiator, yet at the same time it is the enemy of light, carrying upon it the weight of selfishness and pride, in fact *every* sin (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:849,857). It is often represented as a malevolent spirit that attempts to hamper and deceive mankind (Brabazon 2003:[sp]) and has become a symbol of Satan himself (Wake 1870:203). Yet the serpent remains a symbol of life and resurrection at the same time that it is a symbol of death and destruction. The latter interpretation is clearly illustrated in Rowling's construction of Voldemort and the basilisk. The basilisk's eyes bring death and Voldemort, the "Dark Lord", has the appearance of a serpent. His pet snake, Nagini,<sup>27</sup> is responsible for the death of Severus Snape and the near death of both Harry Potter and Arthur Weasley. Similarly the scar that Harry Potter carries on his forehead is a serpentine lightning bolt, a mark of being cursed.

In spite of its negative connotations, the serpent still remains the symbol of the house of Slytherin, and Rowling (2007:607) goes to great lengths at the end of *The Deathly Hallows* to explain that students under Slytherin are not necessarily predisposed to evil or selfish behaviour.

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<sup>27</sup> The name Nagini is derived from the Sanskrit word for serpent: *nāga*. In Vashnaiva tradition semidivine beings called "nagas" appear everywhere and are associated with water and mystical initiation (Wake 1873:375,379).

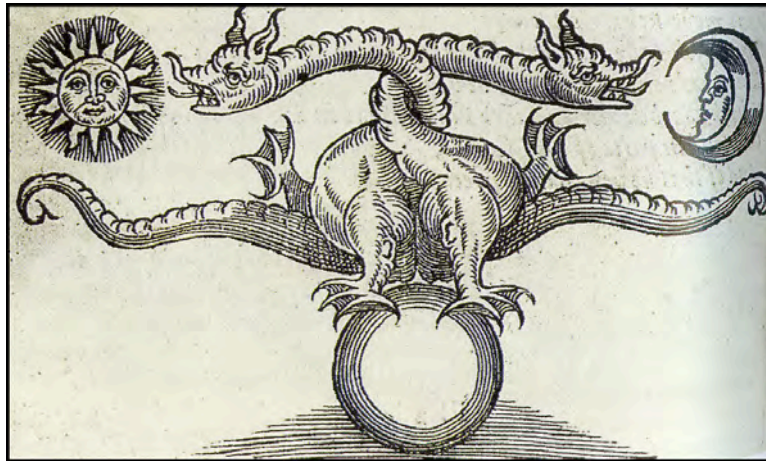
Not every iconic representation of the serpent within the *Harry Potter* films should be regarded as an anticipation of the evil that Voldemort embraces. Subsequently it should be concluded that the two serpents that herald the entrance to the Great Hall are not intended to mark the evil of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It is the students of Hogwarts school (*including* Slytherin house), together with their parents and instructors, that fight the culminating battle against Voldemort and his Death Eaters to end the reign of evil in *The Deathly Hallows*. At the end of the battle Phineas Nigellus, a former headmaster of Hogwarts, is quick to remind everyone: “And let it be noted that Slytherin house played its part! Let our contribution not be forgotten!” (Rowling 2007:598). To interpret the proper context of the mural of the double serpent, it is best to focus on its alchemical significance since the source of its inspiration is an alchemical text.



**Figure 21**

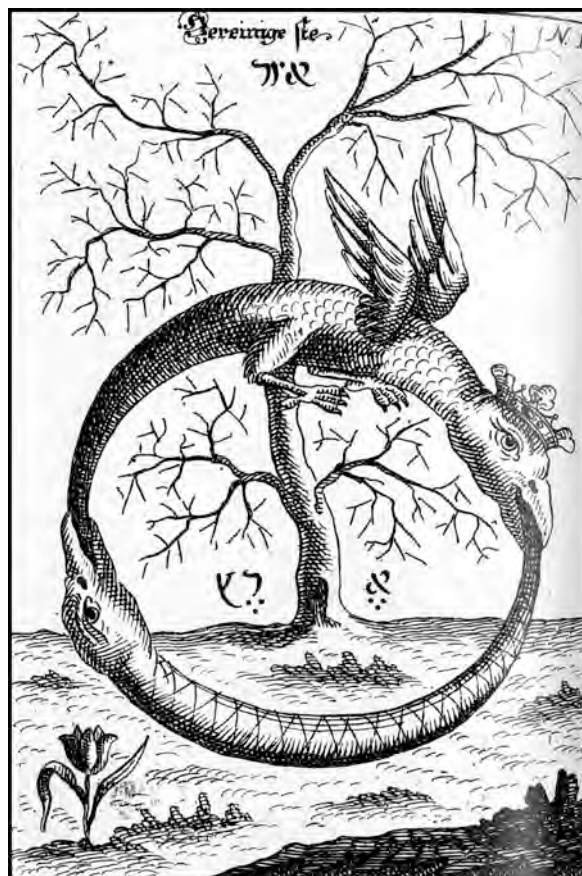
*Detail of the mural above the wooden doors  
of the Great Hall (Columbus 2001).*

In alchemy the dragon, the giant serpent, is a symbol of the *prima materia* and the divine mercurial waters of transformation. It is a representation of the chthonic force of destruction that kills the corrupt metal and dissolves it in the formless first matter (Abraham 1998:181). The mythic serpent exists before creation (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:849). It is “the first god to be found at the start of all cosmogonies” and is therefore a manifestation of a primordial, formless existence. The serpent is subsequently associated with the dark recesses of the earth-womb, the underworld and the ocean (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:845-7). It is the creator and sustainer of life at the same time that it heralds its death and decay back to the latent *prima materia* (Campbell 1976c:15-6).



**Figure 22**

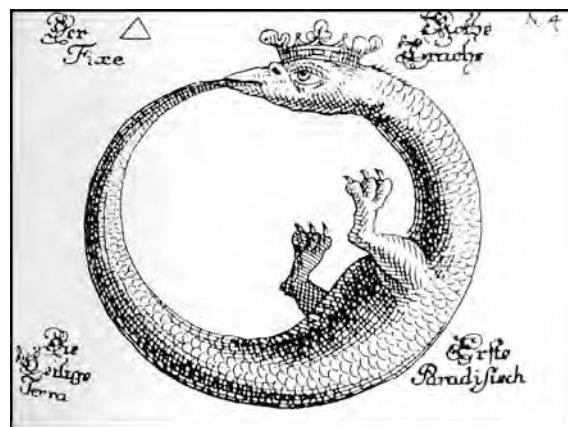
Image from *Theatrum chemicum Britannicum*, London, 1652  
(Roob 2005:408).



**Figure 23**

Two dragons engaged in eternity, from A. Eleazar, *Uraltes Chymisches Werk*, Leipzig, 1735 (Roob 2005:403).

When the alchemical metal is dissolved into the *prima materia*, the male and female seeds of the metal, being sulphur and *argent vive*, manifest as two chthonic serpents. Nicolas Flamel (1624:[sp]) calls these two dragons the true principles and beginnings of alchemy. The dragon with the wings is the volatile female agent, *argent vive*, who is cold and wet. She is the alchemical moon, hence written next to her in the mural above the doors to the Great Hall at Hogwarts is the Latin word for moon, *Luna*, and to her bottom left is a depiction of a crescent moon. The wingless serpent is the male agent alchemical sulphur: the hot and dry element. He is the alchemical sun. It is these two serpents that must re-enact the alchemical love-death ritual. They embrace one another to kill one another, and in so doing they produce the eternal, androgynous seed of the *lapis*. As Nicolas Flamel (1624:[sp]) explains, “These are the Serpents and Dragons which the ancient Ægyptians have painted in a Circle, the head biting the tail, to signify that they proceed from one and the same thing, and that it alone was sufficient, and that in the turning and circulation thereof, it made itself perfect”.<sup>28</sup> These circular serpents are depicted in Figure 23, and they illustrate the same idea of regeneration that is signified through the mythic ouroboros, the serpent who bites his own tail (Figure 24).



**Figure 24**

The ouroboros, from A. Eleazar, *Donum Dei*, Erfurt, 1735  
 (Roob 2005:403).

The double-serpent mural that marks the Great Hall at Hogwarts Castle therefore illustrates the symbolic union of the male and female seeds and the formation of the harmonious androgyne. The double-serpent is ultimately a fertility symbol derived from one of the most prolific forms

<sup>28</sup> Nicolas Flamel is describing the two serpents connected as a circle rather than twisted around one another. Symbolically the two serpents as a circle are an emblem of eternity and immortality and they refer to the ouroboros, the mythic serpent that bites its own tail. It is a symbol of cosmic reincarnation and cyclical manifestation of return. The teeth inject venom into its own body, killing it, yet it is perpetually renewed through an auto-erotic intercourse with its own body (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:846). The circular double-serpent replaces the idea of self-fertilisation with the alchemical enactment of the love-death ritual. The male and female principles unite in an eternal cycle of death and procreation, symbolising the forces of nature.



of copulation in the animal kingdom (Ferwerda 1973:108; Frothingham 1916:175) and a sign of the “world-generating” force of creation (Campbell 1976c:26). The presence of the double-serpent on the caduceus of the Greek Hermes is argued to indicate his origin as a fertility god and god of spring.

The double-serpent was the original symbol of Hermes, and it is with the caduceus (Figure 25) that the god evokes the souls of the departed, and comes to be associated with life and reincarnation. “He [Hermes], a snake to begin with and carrying always a snake-staff, is the very *daimon* of reincarnation” (Harrison, qtd in Frothingham 1916:179). The symbolic serpent is ultimately the symbol of procreation and the guardian of life (Wake 1870:209; 1873:378). The fact that the double-serpent marks the threshold of the Great Hall is a potent symbolic proclamation. The students of all four houses enter the Great Hall by crossing a threshold that is marked by the double-serpent of the spring god, the god of perpetual renewal. In Semitic languages the word for “serpent” is identical to the word for “life” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:845; Frothingham 1916:195). The students at Hogwarts thus enter a symbolic crucible that is designed to bring life from the dead, in the alchemical sense, through a spirit of unification.



**Figure 25**

Mercury (Hermes) holds in both hands a caduceus, symbolising the harmony and fertility of the two serpents. The two fighters represent the quarrelling couple who will be dissolved in the middle where Mercury, also symbolic of the Mercurial bath, awaits them. From D Stolcius von Stolcenberg, *Viridarium chymicum*, Frankfurt, 1624 (Roob 2005:409).

#### 4.3.2. *The Serpent and Creation*

From a description of the alchemical symbolism it is clear that the double-serpent mural in the Great Hall emphasises and progresses the theme of unification laid down in Rowling's novels. There are two other murals, on the opposite end of the Great Hall that are also of prime alchemical significance. They speak of the alchemical work, and the relationship between the *lapis*, the serpent, and the process of creation unto immortality. At the front of the Great Hall is a large window with an alchemical mural on either side. The mural to the right of the great glass window depicts a serpent embracing a winged globe (Figures 26 & 27). Above the globe are illustrations of a crescent moon and a personified sun symbolising the alchemical *Sol* and *Luna*. The presence of these male and female celestial elements carries the same connotation as the two dragons that cover the door and highlights again the theme of unity that pervades the Great Hall.

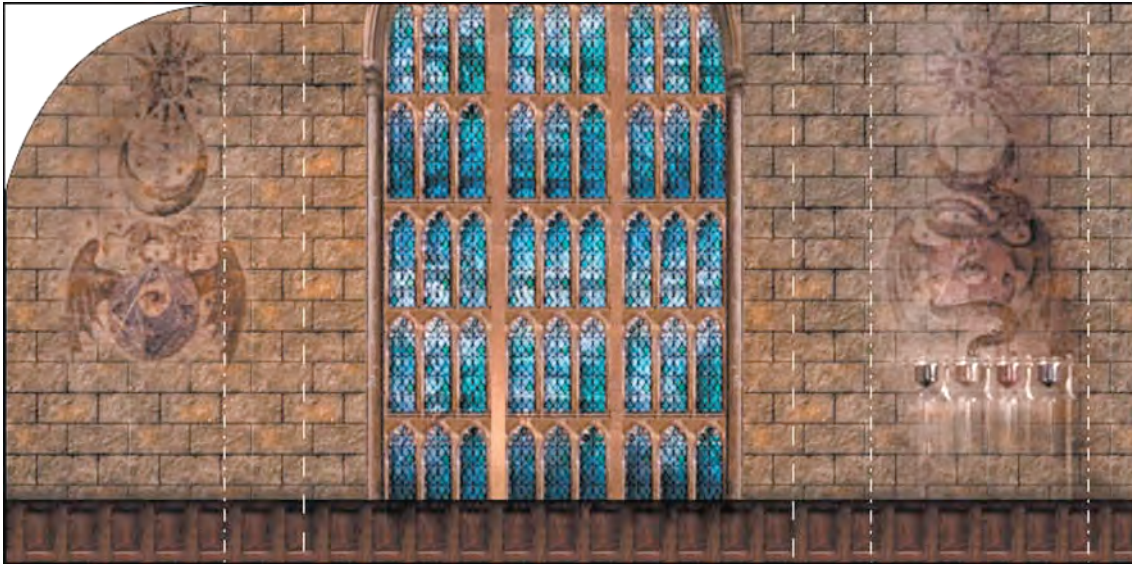


**Figure 26**

*A scene from the Great Hall showing two murals  
at the front of the hall near the large window (Newell 2005).*

The embracing of the serpent and the sphere may be a reminder of the Pelasgian creation myth, where the great serpent Ophion copulated with Eurynome, the Goddess of All Things. The product of this coitus was the Universal Egg. It is Ophion who, at the command of Eurynome, coiled around the egg seven times until it hatched and split into two (Graves 1975:27). Incidentally the alchemist's vessel is often symbolised by an egg. It is the casing in which the transmutation and birth of the *lapis* can occur and it is simultaneously known as both "Egge" and "Sphear" (Abraham 1998:67). According to Blavatsky (1925a:365), the winged sphere is but another form of the egg of immortality, symbolising the rebirth of man.





**Figure 27**

*A “cut out” of the front of the Great Hall, from a printable paper diagram of the Hogwarts Great Hall. (Additional DVD-Rom content on the Chamber of Secrets (Columbus 2002) DVD).*

A sphere, however, need not always be associated with the egg, and this context must be remembered. An egg is ovoid in shape; its edges taper away from the perfect sphere. The sphere remains the ultimate symbol of perfection, established as a three-dimensional circle. Its extremities are equidistant from its central point in all dimensions and directions. The addition of wings to the sphere enhances the connotation of perfection and divinity. The primal hermaphrodite was often depicted as a sphere (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:902) for it is the perfect culmination of the polar principles of the universe, the male and female united in one.

The philosophical golden egg does make a physical appearance in the *Harry Potter* films. In *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), Harry must face three trials. The first of these is to collect a golden egg that is guarded by a fierce dragon (Figure 28). The dragon is none other than a winged representation of the cosmic serpent, like Ophion, that guards and broods over the Universal Egg. This golden egg only opens up to reveal its cryptic clue once Harry Potter submerges it in water (Figure 29). Thus the mythic idea that the golden egg was formed over and hatched from the primordial and chaotic sea is retained (Freund 2003:55-6).



**Figure 28**

*Harry Potter's Philosophical Egg (Newell 2005).*



**Figure 29**

*The Opening of the Egg (Newell 2005).*

It is, however, difficult to assign an absolute interpretation to the mural of the serpent and the sphere without a definite context. Both elements – the serpent and the sphere – have numerous interpretations. The sphere itself is a symbol of creation; it does not need to be tied directly to the Universal Egg to entice this connotation. Three spheres are said to have emanated from God to fill the three heavens: the red sphere of love, the blue sphere of wisdom, and the green sphere of creation (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:902). The serpent in the mural on the right of the great glass window is coiled around the red sphere, the sphere of love. The blue sphere is seen in the mural on the left of the glass window. Hence it could be interpreted that the serpent, the ancient spirit of creation that exists outside of time is engaging in a creative act himself, and that the symbol and product of this creation is the red winged sphere.

The Egyptians believed that the great serpent Atum was the father of all gods (Campbell 1976b:85). As Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996:849) explain, “He was the one who spat out the whole of creation at the beginning of time, after he had emerged by his own efforts from the primeval waters”. This serpent Atum is truly the first of the “Old Gods”. He exists outside of the beginnings and endings of creation, outside of time and space itself, in a region where neither gods nor mortals can tread (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:848-849). In the *Pyramid Text of Pepi I* it is declared that he existed when “not was sky, not was earth, not were men, not were born the gods, not was death” (Budge 1999:161). He spits out creation, but at the end of time he will swallow it again and the earth will return to a formless chaos (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:849). It is for this reason that the alchemists associate the serpent with the *prima materia* and the mercurial waters of transformation.

As mentioned above, the mercurial bath is a place of simultaneous death and rebirth, destruction and creation. The dual-natured serpent, a symbol of the chthonic waters, represents the interrelatedness of these dichotomous principles. Initially the poisonous serpent symbolises the destructive force of the mercurial waters and the slaying of matter. The paradoxical serpent, however, transmutes itself from being the “waters of death” during the *nigredo*, to becoming the life-giving waters that purify and whiten the dead metal at the *albedo*. At this stage it is identified with the mystical Nile river: the magical waters of transformation. At the culmination of the *opus alchymicum*, the river serpent is again transformed and it becomes the *lapis* (Abraham 1998:59,181), the source of the Elixir or “waters of life”. This mystery is contained in the symbolic ouroboros, the serpent that kills yet begets itself, marking the cyclical process of the *opus alchymicum*. It is this eternal serpent, perpetually symbolising the *lapis* as well as the divine creative act, that is coiled around the winged sphere of the right hand mural in the Great Hall. Like the two serpents that mark the threshold of the Great Hall (Figure 21) the singular serpent that is coiled around the winged globe points to the alchemical *lapis*. The double-serpent represents the union of the male and female seeds of the metals. The singular serpent, the “lord of the waters” (Campbell 1976c:10) represents the dissolution of the metal into the primordial fluid and its ultimate perfection into the *lapis*.

#### 4.3.3. *The Serpent and the Alchemical Soul*

That the serpent should be considered a symbol of the *lapis* may appear confusing, particularly in light of the negative connotations that Rowling associates with Voldemort, Nagini and the basilisk. In contrast, the frontispiece of the theosophical work *Der Weg zu Christo* by the alchemist Jacob Böhme depicts two serpents coiled around the globe or egg that houses the soul



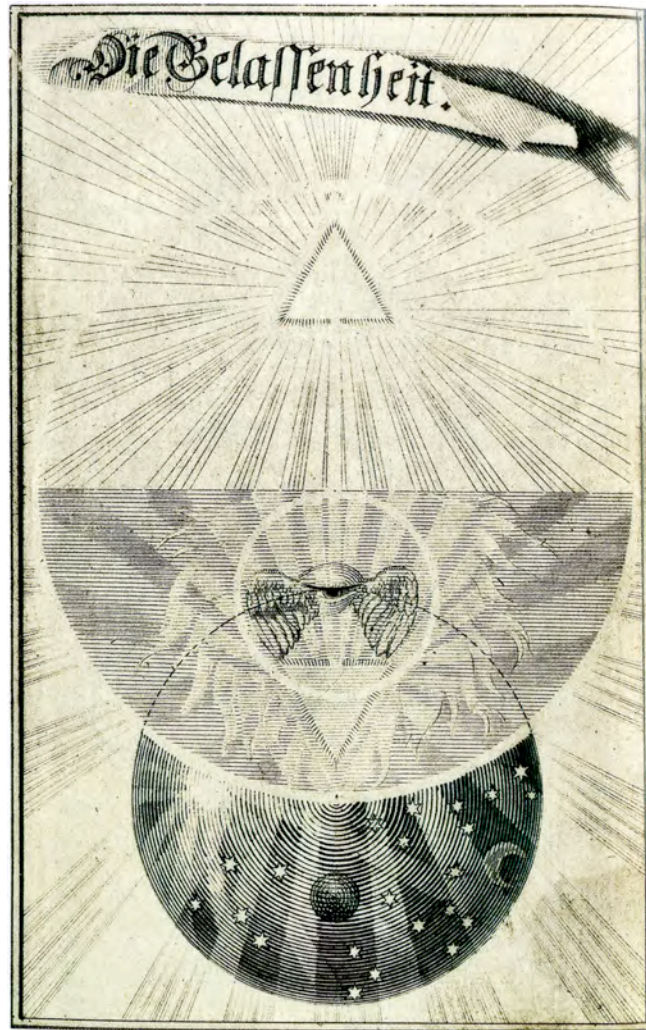
(Figure 30). Here the serpents represent the diabolical or world spirit that keeps the soul trapped. The soul, represented by a glowing eye, can only break free of its false shelter through incredible fire and violence. The scripture, *Matthew 11.12*, which is written above the soul in the illustration reads as follows: “the Kingdom of Heaven has been suffering violence; yes, violent ones are trying to snatch it away” (Stern 1998:1236).



**Figure 30**

Jacob Böhme, *Der Weg zu Christo*, 1730.

(in Roob 2005:428).



**Figure 31**

Jacob Böhme, "Tranquility", *Der Weg zu Christo*.

From *Theosophische Wercke*, Amsterdam, 1682

(in Roob 2005:244).

It is doubtful that the mural of the serpent with the winged globe in the Great Hall is intended to represent only a restrictive spirit. The general framework of the icons in the Great Hall is one of unity and attaining the *lapis*. Hence such negative associations are contextually misplaced. The work of Jacob Böhme does, however, illuminate the meaning of the winged globes. In the frontispiece of the fourth book, *Der Weg zu Christo*, Böhme depicts the soul as a resplendent, spherical eye with two wings (Figure 31). Hence the winged sphere can be interpreted not only as a symbol of the terrestrial or celestial globe, but also as the human soul. Subsequently the mural of the serpent and the globe in the Great Hall (Figures 26 & 27) illustrates the creative serpent, that which makes and becomes the *lapis*, interacting with the illumined soul. The serpent is not weighing down the soul, for its wings lend it volatility. Rather, the serpent has impressed upon the soul. It has engaged with the soul to transform it into the image of the *lapis*. The union of the serpent and the sphere is thus a union of the soul with the cosmic principle of



perfection and immortality: that which exists outside of time. It is a *hieros gamos* (sacred wedding) of the human soul with the ultimate transcendental absolute: “He who remains” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:849).

To fully understand the context of the serpent and the winged sphere, it needs to be appreciated that this illustration forms part of a set of two images (see Figures 26 & 27). The other mural, located to the left of the great glass window, depicts a winged globe surmounted by a great lion. Both images – the serpent-sphere as well as the lion-sphere – are topped with a crescent moon and radiant sun, reminiscent of the alchemical *Sol* and *Luna*. To properly interpret these images it is prudent to look at the alchemical sources that have influenced their creation.

Figure 32 is taken from Jamsthaler’s *Viatorium Spagyricum*. It portrays a *rebis* (hermaphrodite) standing upon a fire-breathing dragon, who lies on top of the winged globe. Over the winged globe are inscribed the numbers “4” and “3”, as well as a square, a triangle and a point, which are all connected. Figure 33, taken from the *Philosophia Reformata*, depicts essentially the same image. The *rebis* is still present, its male and female heads replaced by *Sol* and *Luna*. The same dragon (*sans* fire) rests upon the winged globe. The crucial difference is that the square and triangle are missing from the globe, while the point has been replaced with what appears to be a radiant pupil. The globe therefore comes to resemble a winged eye.



**Figure 32**  
*The Rebis upon the Winged Globe*, from  
 Jamsthaler, *Viatorium spagyricum*, 1625  
 (Jung 1993:372).



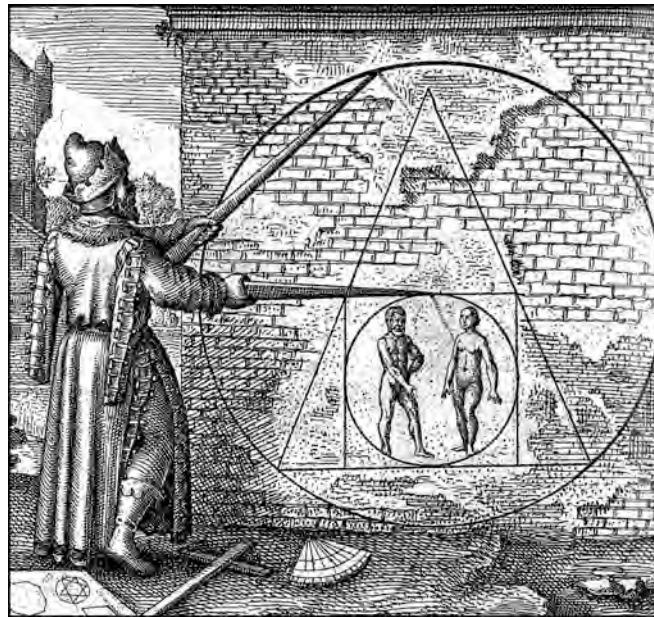
**Figure 33**

*The Rebis as Sol-Luna upon the Winged Globe,*

from Mylius, *Philosophia reformatata*, 1622

(Jung 1993:244).

Both images of the winged globe, the one with the serpent and the one with the lion, that occur at the front of the Great Hall contain elements of these images (Figures 26 & 27). The red sphere and the blue sphere in the murals both contain a square, a triangle and an eye. Though faint these basic geometric shapes are discernable. The eye has merely replaced the point, for both are symbols of the singularity, the centre of the universe. It is a representation of the “eye of god” that is the “transitory *fiat*” a point of creation and of “absolute zero that signifies the death[-]life of a whole new cycle” (Purcell 1998:[sp], emphasis added). Hence the centre of nature is the point originated by God; it is the “sun-point” in the world egg (Jung 1989:45). According to Michael Maier (qtd in Purcell 1998:[sp]), the accentuation of the centre point is the fundamental idea of alchemy, for the centre contains the indivisible point which is eternal and indestructible. In physical terms it is the immortal alchemical gold.



**Figure 34**

“Make from the man and woman a circle, from that a square, then a triangle, then another circle, and you will have the philosopher’s stone”. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, Oppenheim, 1618 (Roob 2005:466).

*Emblema XXI* from Maier’s *Atalanta Fugiens* (Figure 34) depicts an alchemist drawing a square, a triangle and two circles upon a wall. Accompanying this figure, Maier (1617:[sp]) writes “Make of the man and woman a Circle, of that a Quadrangle, of this a Triangle, of the same a Circle and you will have the Stone of the Philosophers”. In other words, the man and woman are united as a hermaphrodite and become one: an eternal circle. The square represents the four elements, separated from the simple body of the circle (Roob 2005:466), while the triangle represents the reduction of the four into the triune composition of man: Body, Spirit and Soul. The final circle is an “invariable redness”, the harmonised product of the *rubedo*, symbolising that all has “returned again to an unity in which there is Rest and Peace” (Maier 1617:[sp]). If three and four are combined, then their sum is the number seven, which is the number of the completion and perfection of the work. Hence the entire alchemical work is embodied in the winged globe upon which the *rebis* stands (Figure 32) – the same winged globes that mark the front of the Great Hall at Hogwarts.

In the image of Jamsthaler’s *rebis* standing upon the winged globe (Figure 32), the monster that rests upon the sphere of seven is a winged serpent. It represents the volatile Mercury, who will fly away unless it is bound with measure. Hence the *rebis* stands above this dragon, fixing it in place. The dragon, like the globe, is winged, indicating that it is no longer bound to physical passions, but rather has been elevated or spiritualised. The globe, the dragon and the *rebis* are all united within the shape of the philosophical egg: “The egg of nature they call me, known to

all the philosophers... Quicksilver or Mercury fine I am called in general... An old dragon, an old man, I am everywhere near and far” (*Theoria Philosophiae Hermeticae*, qtd in Roob 2005:494). The old dragon and the philosophical egg therefore refer to the same thing. Both are indicative of philosophical Mercury, or *Mercurius*, the universal agent of transmutation. *Mercurius* is simultaneously the medium of the work (dragon), as well as the entirety of the work (egg). At its completion philosophical Mercury becomes the much-desired *lapis*. The egg therefore symbolises the entire *body* of the alchemical work. This is not just the body of the metal, but also the body of the alchemist. The dragon, representing volatile Mercury, is conquered by the harmonious *rebis*, who is the fixed *Mercurius*. As such, the dragon comes to represent the “old metal”, which dies in the *prima materia*, while the *rebis* is the “new metal”, the *lapis*, born from the dragon but responsible for its death.

Hence in this one image lie the clues to unravelling the winged sphere murals of the Great Hall (Figures 26 & 27). The mural to the right of the great window already illustrates the bottom half of the alchemical image: a serpent-dragon interacting with a winged globe. It is the mural to the left, depicting a lion on top of a winged sphere, that represents the top half of Jamsthaler’s image: the *rebis* who stands upon the dragon and the sphere. The mature *rebis*, standing upon the dragon, is the culmination of the alchemical *rubedo* and a symbol of the *lapis*. If it is replaced with an image of a lion, then the mural on the left of the Great Hall can be traced. While this visual substitution may seem arbitrary, it should be noted that the *red lion*, like the *rebis*, is an alchemical symbol of the *lapis* and the Elixir of Life. If the symbolic red hue is replaced with its natural golden yellow colour, then the lion becomes a reference for the gold of the philosophers. This is the origin of the yellow lion that stands upon the winged globe in the left mural of the front of the Great Hall at Hogwarts. The *rebis*/lion and the dragon that stand upon the winged globe in Jamsthaler’s *Viatorium Spagyricum* (Figure 32) have simply been split across two images. The murals in the Great Hall use the lion and not the *rebis* to signify the completion of the work, because the lion is associated with Gryffindor. The lion is juxtaposed with the serpent of the right mural, the emblem of Slytherin House, and highlights the Gryffindor versus Slytherin theme present throughout the *Harry Potter* novels.

The lion, standing upon the winged globe, is a potent Messianic signifier. Krishna was regarded as “a lion among wild creatures” while the Christ is called “the Lion of Judah” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:611; Warren 2000:76-8). It is the Christ who, in alchemical terms, is the perfect hermaphrodite: wholly Man and perfectly God at the same time. The heraldic lion (and not the griffin) is the symbol of Gryffindor House, the banner over Harry Potter. The lion above the winged globe stands for physical and spiritual power, victory and conquest. It is the perfect symbol for the *lapis* as its “heedless, angry appetite” devours and conquers all (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:613), transforming it into its own nature: gold. In Egypt lions were often

depicted back-to-back, one facing east and the other west. They symbolised the course of the sun from the one end of the earth to the other, and they observed its daily death and rebirth. Like the dragon-serpent, they symbolise yesterday and tomorrow, the eternal cycle. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996:613), “The lion has come not only to symbolize the return of the Sun and the revival of cosmic and physical energy, but rebirth itself”. Similarly the Christian lion is a symbol of the resurrection.

In essence then there is very little difference between the winged globe embraced by the serpent and the winged globe surmounted by the lion. Both symbols refer to the cosmological cycles of death and rebirth. More specifically, the serpent is the beginning of the alchemical work, the old metal that is killed in the hope of rebirth, while the lion is the culmination of the work, the mature, androgynous metal. Figure 32, from the *Viatorium Spagyricum*, illustrates the combination of these principles: youth, the product of *rubedo*, stands above the ancient serpent of the *nigredo*. This entire cosmological cycle is held within the egg, which is the body, and it is inscribed over the winged globe, which in this context should be interpreted as the volatile, illumined soul. It is fixed, or held in place, by the *rebis*, who hold the tools of creation in its hands: the compass and carpenter’s square. The square is formed of a right angle; it belongs to geometry and the measurement of terrestrial planes. The compass is associated with spherical trigonometry, which is the science of the spheres and the heavens (Pike 1871:11). Together the two symbolise the entirety of creation.

The two murals in the front of the Great Hall (Figures 26 & 27) therefore represent different aspects of the alchemical work, but both refer to the *lapis*. Placed along side one another, the mural on the left speaks of the completed work standing over the illumined soul, the one on the right highlights the beginning of the creative work. In both cases the winged globe is a depiction of the illumined soul, as has already been inferred from the illustrations of Jacob Böhme (Figure 31). The alchemical serpent may die, but it remains a life giving principle. In its death it allows the *lapis*, the golden lion to be born.

#### 4.3.4. *The Serpent in the Window*

That the alchemical serpent depicted in the murals of the Great Hall is a symbol of eternal life and not a diabolical spirit is irrevocably illustrated in the window placed between the serpent-sphere and lion-sphere murals. The large window is basically a triptych with a left, centre and right panel. Each third of the triptych again has three windows horizontally and six rows of windows vertically that taper towards the arched apex (see Figure 27). The bottom rows of the triptych are shown in Figure 35. At the bottom centre of the image a contorted serpent can be



seen. This serpent is odd, however, in that it has a wide, legged torso that separates the neck and head from the tail. The serpent's head, which is devouring the tail, is located just above the torso. This creature could best be described as a dragon, for in alchemy the serpent and the dragon carry similar signification. A detailed image of this is shown in Figure 36.



**Figure 35**

*The large glass window in the front of the Great Hall, showing the twisted serpent in the lower middle panel of the triptych. From a digital composite at the end of *The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001).*

The serpent in the glass window is standing on a winged sphere, which can be seen in Figure 37. This sphere, unlike the two spheres depicted in the murals on either side of the great window, is most certainly the terrestrial globe. Depicted on its surface is the inverted T symbol. The inverted T within a circle ( $\ominus$ ) derives from a Mediaeval ideogram for the map of the world. Its vertical line represents the Mediterranean while its horizontal line indicates the Nile river. Within this map the right upper section becomes Europe, the left upper section Africa, and the lower half of the circle becomes Asia. When this ideogram is converted to a sphere it becomes the orb of the earth and a symbol of power (Liungman 1997:[sp]).



**Figure 36**

*Detail of the serpent in Figure 35.*

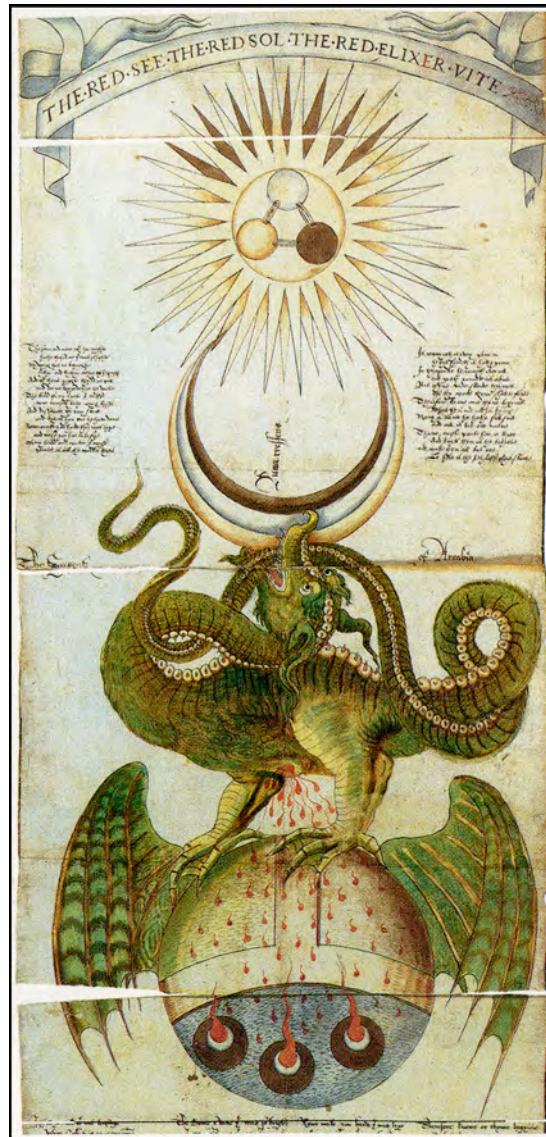


**Figure 37**

*Interior shot of the Great Hall with the large glass windows in the background. The globe on which the legged serpent stands can be seen in the top left of the picture (Columbus 2002).*

This legged serpent that stands upon the earth brings context to the two murals on either side of the large window. The image is a direct reference to an illustration from the *Ripley Scroll* (Figure 38). The two serpents depicted in these illustrations share a similar form and stature, and both are located above the terrestrial globe. Similarly, both the image of the serpent in the window of the Great Hall and the serpent from the manuscript are placed beneath a union of three spheres that are connected by short linear joints, comparable to a modern day molecular diagram (have a look at the top middle window in Figure 35). This triangle of spheres is visible

inside of the alchemical sun that hovers over the crescent moon held in the serpent's mouth. The presence of the alchemical sun and moon above the image of the serpent in the *Ripley Scroll* reveals the origin of the sun and moon drawn over the mural of the lion-sphere and the serpent-sphere (Figures 26 & 27).



**Figure 38**

The Serpent of Arabia. From the *Ripley Scroll*, 16<sup>th</sup> century (in Roob 2005:417).

The three spheres, joined as a triangle inside of the sun, represent a unity in trinity, the Triune God. They also represent the tripartite composition of man: soul, spirit and flesh. That this triangle of spheres occurs in two images that depict a legged serpent, devouring its own tail and standing upon the terrestrial globe, should be enough to conclude that the source of the image in



the window of the Great Hall is the *Ripley scroll*. The symbolic meaning of the image is most pertinent. The caption above the triangle of spheres reads “The red see [sea], the red sol [sun], the red elixir vite [Elixir of Life]”. The imagery is therefore associated with the *rubedo* stage of the *opus alchymicum*. The legged serpent, known as the Serpent of Arabia, is a representation of the culmination of the *rubedo*. The divine mercurial water is depicted as blood that pours from the heart of the serpent. It is the blood, shown as little red corpuscles with tails, that flows from the serpent onto the earth in a symbolic gesture: “It brings happiness to whomsoever finds it, and flows, round as a ball, to every place in the world” (Roob 2005:417). The magical mercurial or permanent water overcomes everything metallic and transforms it to its own image. It is the *lapis* in its fluid form. This water is called “dragon’s blood” (Abraham 1998:59), and it is the great wizard-chemist Albus Dumbledore who is reported to have discovered the twelve uses of dragon’s blood in *The Philosopher’s Stone* (Rowling 1997:77).

Including the Serpent of Arabia illustrated in the window, this chapter has highlighted four separate depictions of the archetypal serpent within the Great Hall at Hogwarts. Each of these serpent representations conveys a different yet particular facet of alchemy within the context of the *Harry Potter* films. The large busts of winged serpents protruding from the walls of the Great Hall (Figure 20) represent the house of Slytherin and subsequently the alchemical element of water. The double serpent over the door (Figure 21) represents the union of the male and female principles during the *nigredo* of the alchemical work. The serpent interacting with the sphere at the front of the Great Hall (Figure 26 & 27) is a symbol of *Mercurius* (Hermes) as simultaneously the medium and the entirety of the alchemical work. Finally, the Serpent of Arabia (Figure 36) represents the source of the healing waters of the *lapis*. According to the sixteenth century alchemist Hieronymus Reussner (in Roob 2005:416), the serpent-dragon that grows from the philosopher’s tree (a symbol for the course of the *opus alchymicum*), is “our Mercury [*Mercurius*]”, the “water of life” from which God created all things.

These visual examples highlight the notion that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry functions as a symbolic crucible for the alchemical work. The very symbols that describe the *opus alchymicum* are consciously and conscientiously written upon its walls. Because the serpent is associated with both the *lapis* and the actual process of the alchemical work, it is an important symbol within the *Harry Potter* films. Visual instances of the serpent are found outside of the Great Hall, and even outside of Hogwarts. The serpent-dragon forms an architectural and thematic leitmotif throughout the *Harry Potter* films. It is found, for instance, on the roof of the herbology greenhouse (Figure 39), holding a crystal globe in the divination classroom (Figure 40), adorning the Triwizard Cup (Figure 41), and even upon the vaulted archways of the ministry of magic (Figure 42), to mention only a few incidents.



**Figure 39**

*A dragon on the roof of the greenhouse*  
(Columbus 2002).



**Figure 40**

*The dragon in the divination classroom*  
(Cuaron 2004).

Now that the visual presence of the serpent has been discussed, along with its general alchemical significance, it is possible to move on to a more detailed analysis of its signification within the *Harry Potter* films. Chapter Five considers the relationship between the serpent and the mystical figure of *Mercurius* in more detail. Because the serpent-dragon is a signifier of the *lapis philosophorum*, it is critical to the visual analysis of the *Harry Potter* films to discuss the visual representation of this symbol outside of stagnant murals in the Great Hall. Just as the serpent manifests itself in a number of guises on the walls of the Great Hall, so it sheds its skin and reappropriates itself continually within the actual narrative of the *Harry Potter* films. What

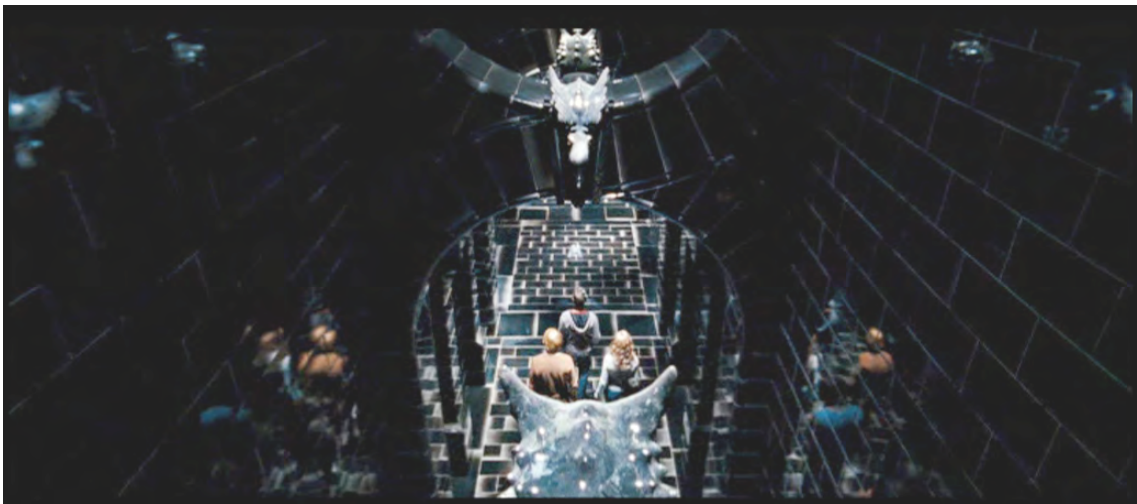


remains, therefore, is to consider the theoretical implication of the serpent-*lapis* relationship to the visual interpretation of *Harry Potter*. This reading is extended to a consideration of the relationship between the protagonist, Harry Potter, and the serpent, and how his continual encounter with the archetypal serpent unveils his alchemical destiny.



**Figure 41**

*Three dragons embrace the Triwizard Cup*  
(Newell 2005).



**Figure 42**

*Dragon-like heads above the archways in*  
*The Department of Mysteries* (Yates 2007).



## CHAPTER 5

### *The Serpent and the Stone*

#### 5.1. Introduction

From the discussion presented in the previous chapter, it is apparent that not every depiction of the serpent within the *Harry Potter* films is a negative one. The murals described thus far may not have great narrative significance within the films, but their presence does highlight the alchemical foundations of Hogwarts castle, and the complexity of alchemical imagery. The archetypal serpent image shares in this complexity. In alchemy the serpent-dragon can manifest itself as either a singular or double entity, illustrated on opposite walls of the Great Hall. It can represent the old, dying metal, sulphur & *argent vive*, the mercurial waters, the *prima materia* or even the *lapis* itself. This is because the serpent-dragon is ultimately identified with the mystical *Mercurius*, the universal agent of transmutation and the central symbol of alchemy:

Mercurius is present everywhere and at all times during the opus. From the dark chthonic beginnings... to the divine, triumphant completion, Mercurius is not only the *prima materia*... but also the *ultima materia* (the philosopher's stone), the goal of his own transformation. Mercurius is not only the matter of the work but stands also for all the processes to which the materia is subjected. He is simultaneously the matter of the work, the process of the work, and the agent by which all this is effected. (Abraham 1998:125)

The malleable character of *Mercurius* highlights the complex nature of alchemical idioms. An alchemical symbol can have more than one meaning, depending on the context in which it is used. Each symbolic mural acts as a hieroglyph that is a quagmire of “double meanings, natural analogies and hermetick interpretations of classical mythology” (Klossowski de Rola 1997:8). Such emblems, which easily convey a multiplicity of meanings, constitute an ideal vehicle for the transmission of esoteric information (Klossowski de Rola 1997:13), which is often built upon layers of analogies.

It is therefore impossible to reduce alchemical symbolism to a literal and singular interpretation; the result is an ossified sign with a limited signified. To conclude that the symbol can only mean this *or* that throughout the narrative is restrictive. While such an approach may be suited to the academic discipline, it establishes a contextual dichotomy of meaning. Any interpretation that is based on strict dichotomies: good and evil, life and death, beginning and ending, is in danger of losing sight of the whole. An esoteric understanding of alchemy reveals that contradictions are swallowed in the ebb and flow of the whole. Binary manifestations remain simply that: manifestations. They are not polar absolutes to which the sign strives. Such an idea is seen, for example, in Hindu tradition where the Great God Shiva is reflected in all the other divinities. They are masks, or appendages, of the greater principle. “He soaks up their characteristics and makes them his own” (Storl 2004:7). After all, as Ramakrishna has said, “It was revealed to me that the universe itself is Shiva” (Campbell 1976a:25). The same language is spoken by the Egyptian serpent Atum, “I am he who remains... The Earth shall return to formless chaos, and then I shall transform myself into a serpent which no man knows and no god sees” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:849). It is a point of eternal return: simultaneous everything and nothing. Beginning and ending, death and rebirth, time and eternity; all are held in a singular image, a symbolic conundrum: “what *presents* itself is essentially multiple; *what* presents itself is essentially one” (Badiou 2005:23).

The *what* presenting itself is likened by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2004:125-7) to an “ultimate signified”. It is not an absolutist entity, nor is it the binary opposite of some “ultimate signifier”. Rather, the two exist as one and the same. In a signifying system where one sign refers to another *ad infinitum* (i.e. serpent = resurrection = *lapis* = phoenix = Christ = the brazen serpent of Moses), the signifying chain returns in a circular fashion. Its beginning is its ending; interpretation is carried through to infinity and the “ultimate signified” is therefore nothing other than the signifier itself. The form of the signifier is imagined to have substance or a body, what Deleuze and Guattari (2004:127,129) refer to as its Face. The face is simply the substance of its expression, but it arouses all forms of metaphorical association. The ultimate signified is no different from the esoteric Shiva, whose visage is multiplied in the masks or faces of the other divinities. Similarly the shaman who wears a mask during a time of ritual is identified with the god for its duration. According to Campbell (1976a:21), “He does not merely represent the god; he *is* the god”. Signifier and signified become one. “The despot-god has never hidden his face, far from it: he makes himself one, or even several. The mask does not hide the face; it *is* the face. The priest administers the face of god” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004:127).

Therefore, no matter how the serpent, the *lapis*, or the phoenix are interpreted, it is never a simple case of unilateral reference. Such complex symbols should not be said to have only a singular meaning at a singular context. The opposites of “life” and “death” embodied in this

spectrum of signs are but manifestations of the same temporal continuum, segregated by a contextual rift. This rift, or point of intersection, could be likened to a frame of a film. It carries data, but without the context of the remainder of the film it may be misinterpreted. The hero of today may quickly become the tyrant of tomorrow (Campbell 1993:349). The serpent that brought death will once again precipitate life. Hence at a particular “frame” the serpent may tend to carry a particular symbolism derived from its context, but its meaning also “leans toward” the remainder of its symbolism, illustrated in a different cultural context, or perhaps later in the same film. Clearly the serpent is not “life” *or* “death”; it is life *and* death; life tending toward death or death tending toward rebirth. In true alchemical fashion the symbol continues to transmute itself. It is a union of opposites, manifesting as one *and* the other.

In response, a hermeneutic analysis of the *Harry Potter* films must be aware of the multiplicity of meaning. As mentioned earlier, context is important in deriving the meaning of Rowling’s text, for context may help to determine the primary meaning that a sign is intended to evoke. However, the context of the visual sign should not nullify the associated, or supplementary meanings that the sign carries. To do so would be to err with regards to the alchemical interpretation, which sees “all religious myths and imagery as the cloak of a hidden allegory” (Klossowski de Rola 1997:16); one which involves the transmutation of metals into the *lapis*. JK Rowling has proven, throughout the *Harry Potter* novels, that she is capable of introducing symbols that are multifaceted. To restrict their interpretation to a singularity is to suffer the consequence of a shallow reading. Essentially the hermeneutic circle of meaning held by the serpent is a complex weave of interconnected “faces”. It is possible to lose hope and assume that the interpretation of the serpent image is always going to be subject to circular redundancy. However, the cyclical signification of the serpent does not necessarily predicate that its meaning is inherently trapped within its own hermeneutic circle. Nor does it imply that any facet of its symbolism, any random mytheme, can be blindly applied to a particular visual representation. Remembering the importance of context, and the hermeneutic assumption that the interpreter “must seek to place himself in the creative center of the artist” (Martin 1972:100), it is possible to open up the circle of meaning embedded in the serpent image and analyse what the context of its placement reveals.

As an example, consider the serpent that Rowling places on the shield of Slytherin (Figure 18). Within this context, the *primary* meaning of the serpent is that it is an emblem of Slytherin House. Salazar Slytherin was associated with a serpent because he was a Parselmouth (a wizard able to speak with serpents). However, the reader is also aware that the serpent of Slytherin (and not just the serpent in general) has an underlying connotation of darkness and evil, built up through years of tradition in the wizarding community. As Ron Weasley informs Harry Potter, “There’s not a witch or wizard who went bad that wasn’t in Slytherin” (Columbus 2001).

Additionally, within the alchemical context of the novels, Slytherin house represents the occidental element of water. The serpent that marks the banner of Slytherin is therefore also the symbolic Lord of the waters, a god of the primeval ocean. These supplementary connotations may not be appropriate for each context where the Slytherin banner is raised, for Rowling reveals at the end of *The Deathly Hallows* that Slytherin's loyalties do not always lie with darkness; nor is Slytherin always the supremely victorious house, blessed by the serpent of water. However, these supplementary connotations are always present, forming a *metatext* every time that the symbol is used. Alchemical symbolism is particularly tricky because the same symbols can be used in different contexts to convey completely different meanings, and yet they still manage to reference one another. Contradictions are swallowed by the whole.

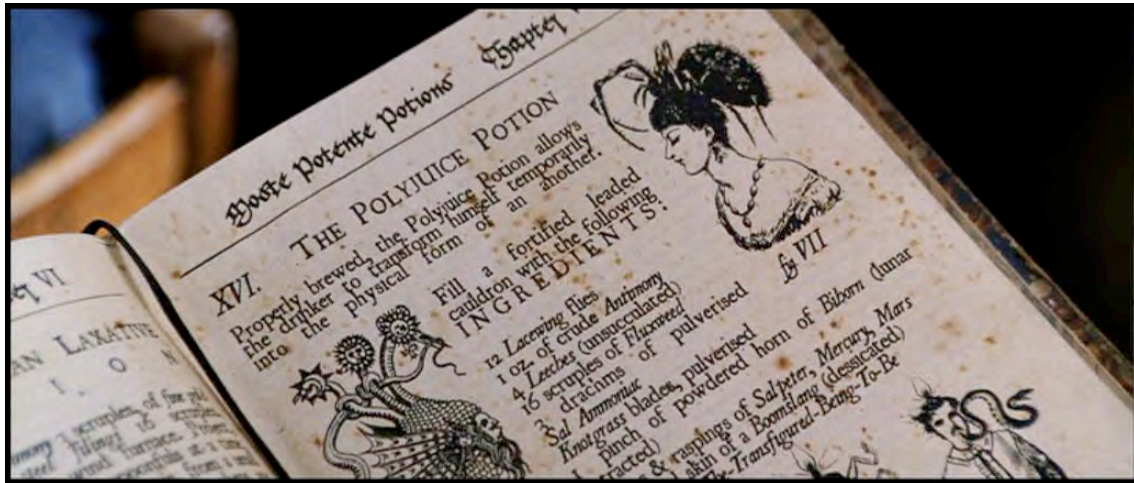
To best illustrate this point, two remaining serpent images from the *Harry Potter* films are analysed. Both occur in *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002). One is ancillary to the plot, a visual anecdote in effect, while the other is fundamental to the development of the film and the conclusion of the final novel: *The Deathly Hallows*.

## 5.2. Python and the Polyjuice Potion

In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry Potter returns to Hogwarts to discover that an ancient monster has been released and that it is attacking students that aren't of "pure" wizard blood. Harry Potter suspects that his rival, Draco Malfoy, is behind the attacks, however he cannot ask him directly to reveal anything about the monster. In an attempt to discover the truth, Harry and his two friends Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger decide to concoct a potent brew called the Polyjuice Potion. The potion allows the drinker to transform himself temporarily into the appearance of whomsoever he chooses. The plan is that Harry and Ron use the potion to transform themselves into two of Malfoy's friends, while Hermione mimics a female Slytherin student. Their hope is that if they ask him questions while posing as his friends they might be able to find out if he knows anything about the mysterious monster rumoured to live in the Chamber of Secrets.

The Polyjuice Potion is a critical narrative device. Not only does it enable Harry and his two friends to change shape, it is later also used by an impostor to mimic a Hogwarts teacher in *The Goblet of Fire*. Furthermore it is drunk several times during the final novel: *The Deathly Hallows*. The potion, with its temporary transformative power, is a symbol of the alchemical *prima materia*. Like the *prima materia* the potion remains a fluid, formless mass. Adding a hair from the person that the transformer wishes to turn into, evokes a change of form and the Polyjuice Potion becomes a transfigurative elixir.





**Figure 43**  
 A page from the book “*Moste Potente Potions*” showing the recipe for the *Polyjuice Potion* (Columbus 2002).

Figure 43 shows a frame from *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002) where a page containing the recipe for making the Polyjuice Potion is recorded. To the left of the list of ingredients is an illustration of a *multi-headed serpent*. The image is ancillary to the narrative of *The Chamber of Secrets* in that it is not required in order to explain the functioning of the Polyjuice Potion; this occurs through the dialogue of the film. The book that the recipe occurs in is mentioned by Rowling, but its description is somewhat different to the visual image. The book page depicted in the film reveals a startling depth of signification. The three illustrations that are visible on the page, as well as the list of ingredients, express the intensity of alchemical symbolism within the films. In order to understand the full significance of the multi-headed serpent, the alchemical nature of the Polyjuice Potion itself must first be analysed.

From the list of ingredients it is clear that the potion has been interpreted to have alchemical origins. The potion requires three critical ingredients: *Antimony*, *Sal Ammoniac* and some raspings of *Mars*. Not one of these ingredients is mentioned by Rowling in the novel of *The Chamber of Secrets* (1998:124). They are purposeful additions for the film. In the seventeenth century antimony sometimes replaced mercury as the basal metal of alchemical experiments. It was recommended by Basil Valentine in *The Triumphant Chariot of Antimony* and utilised by Isaac Newton in his alchemical experiments (Abraham 1998:8; Marshall 2002:405-406; Newton 2003:245). The ore of antimony can be reduced by using iron, which is known in alchemy as *Mars*: the hard, weighty and bad metal named after the planet and the Roman god of war (Abraham 1998:122). Iron often has negative connotations because the Iron Age itself has been viewed as tragic and debased, occupied by an uninterrupted succession of wars and massacres, slavery and impoverishment (Eliade 1978:67; Ovid 2002:35). When antimony is reduced by

iron, it is possible to purify it to such an extent that it crystallises and forms a star-like pattern, known as the “Star Regulus of Antimony” (Abraham 1998:8; Marshall 2002:406). The star Regulus is the brightest star in the constellation of Leo, and its name comes from the Latin for “little king”. In the *Harry Potter* novels it is revealed that the character Regulus Black was the brother of Sirius Black. Just as Sirius Black marks the black stage, or *nigredo*, of the alchemical work, so antimony is associated with the “black earth” on account of its “brilliant blackness which it assumes after solution” (Abraham 1998:8). Rowling (2007:46), incidentally, describes the almost completed Polyjuice Potion as looking “like mud”, while drinking the final product feels like “swallow[ing] live snakes” (1998:162).

The third ingredient of the potion, *Sal Ammoniac*, is the old name for ammonium chloride, which was used in the washing and purifying phase leading up to the *albedo* (Abraham 1998:176). After the *albedo*, the material is ready to take on the form of the spirit with which it is reunited. This final stage is symbolised by the potion-maker adding a bit of whoever he wishes to turn into, to the mixture (Rowling 1998:124). In *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:47-48), Harry Potter completes a Polyjuice Potion by dropping some of his own hair into the mud-like liquid so that his friends can appear like him and act as decoys to aid his escape. At the moment that the hair (which is imparting “form” to the material) makes contact with the surface: “the Potion began to froth and smoke then, all at once, it turned a clear, bright gold”. The potion is complete, Harry’s hair has “perfected” the material and the result is a golden potion, symbolic of alchemical gold and the attainment of the *rubedo*. It indicates the pure state of Harry’s soul.

In essence the Polyjuice Potion functions like a miniature alchemical experiment. The three ingredients mentioned indicate that the potion has a close resemblance to the idea of the *prima materia* and the Aristotelian notion that the elements can be transformed into one another because they share a common principle (Aristotle 2003:35; Plato 2003:33). The Polyjuice Potion embodies the spirit of *Mercurius*, the universal agent of transformation. This is not an absolute correlation, only a metaphorical association of properties. The illustrations that accompany the recipe express just how intimately the Polyjuice Potion can be linked to the idea of alchemical transformation and the *prima materia*.

The illustration of the multi-headed serpent to the left of the list of ingredients (Figure 43) is copied directly from an alchemical image of the serpent *Python* (Figure 44), who is the “Spiritus Mercurialis” (Purcell 1998a:[sp]). This monstrous dragon represents the transformations of *Mercurius*. It has four tails and four “heads”. The fourth tail binds itself around the trinity at the top of the dragon’s body. As such, this creature represents a unity in diversity. The first of the three smaller “heads” arising from the left tail at the apex of the main body, and closest to the

centre margin of the book, is a depiction of the alchemical moon: *Luna*. The circular figure adjacent to this represents *Sol*. The right-most tail of the trinity depicts the conjunction of *Sol* and *Luna*, an androgynous unity written over the symbol for Mercury (Jung 1983:ii). Together these three form *Mercurius*: “the divine messenger, the god of revelation, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, the Prime Matter and the *philosophers* [sic] *stone*” (Purcell 1998b:[sp], emphasis added). This dragon contains within it the four fundamental numerical principles of alchemy: 1. The presence of the singularity or the whole (the entire dragon), 2. The unity of the two binaries (*Sol* and *Luna* in conjunction), 3. The triune body (the three tails or heads depicting *Sol*, *Luna* and the conjunction of *Sol et Luna*), and 4. The tetrad symbolised by the binding of these three with the fourth tail.



**Figure 44**

Python, *Spiritus Mercurialis* (Jung 1983:ii).

Therefore at every level this monstrous dragon/serpent is the embodiment of unity and transformation, whose perfection is the *lapis*. It is the perfect culmination of alchemical symbology and an appropriate symbol for the Polyjuice Potion. Python/*Mercurius* is the water of transformation and the formless matter of the *prima materia*. He is a supreme archetype, the semiotic “despot-god” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004:126,127), because “Transformation, fluidity, not stubborn ponderosity is the characteristic of the living God” (Campbell 1993:337).

Subsequently the dragon becomes a metaphor for self-development and the establishment of the pattern of the perfect man (Brabazon 2003:[sp]). In short, its ultimate transformation is the *ultima materia*, the wondrous *lapis*.

The Polyjuice Potion, however, is not a permanent transformation, nor is it the establishment of any form of divine reality. Thus the image of Python from the page of “Moste Potente Potions” (Figure 43) is juxtaposed by an image of a woman with a spider upon the crown of her head. It is a reminder of the Greek Arachne who was transformed into a spider by the goddess Athene. Like the serpent, the spider is also a demiurge, a *psychopomp*, and an intermediary between human and divine reality. The spider weaves the fabric of reality with a fragile thread, a metaphor for the tenuous relationship between reality and illusion (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:904,905). The presence of the spider illustrates that the Polyjuice Potion does not present a new alchemical reality, merely an illusion. The drinker of the potion remains the same inside. It is only his physical appearance that has changed for a brief period of time. Alchemy, in contrast, attempts to transform the inner-man by breaking down the physical body and releasing the spirit.

That the Polyjuice Potion represents nothing more than a deception (whether used for good or evil) is highlighted by the image to the bottom right of the page (Figure 43), that depicts a serpent arising from the mouth of a man. This image is almost a premonition of what occurs at the end of *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002) when the basilisk, as a mock tongue, is finally revealed, slithering out of the mouth of a sculpture of Salazar Slytherin (Figure 45). It is a fitting depiction of Slytherin’s ability to speak with serpents.



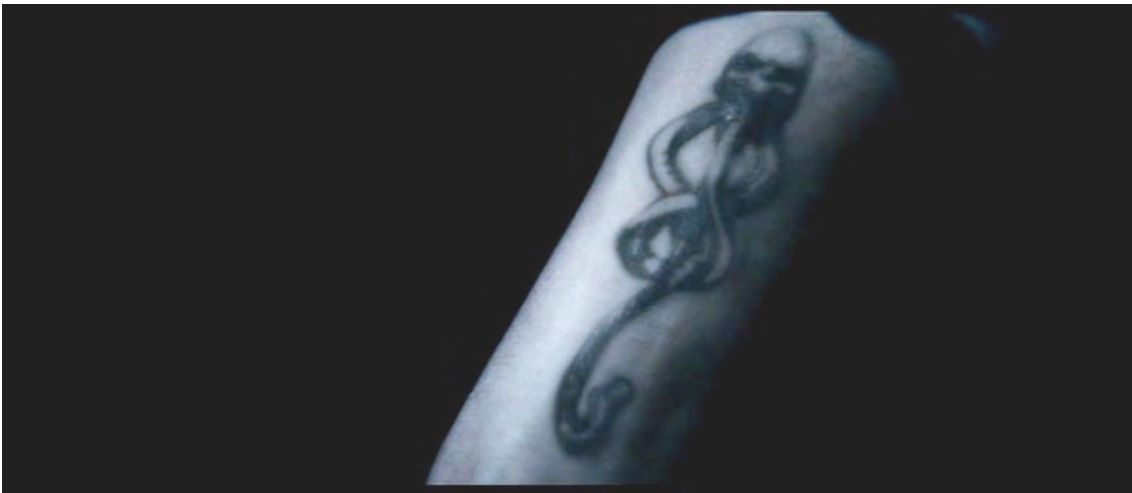
**Figure 45**

*The basilisk emerges from the mouth of a statue of Salazar Slytherin (Columbus 2002).*





**Figure 46**  
*The Dark Mark* (Newell 2005).



**Figure 47**  
*The Mark of the Death Eaters* (Newell 2005).

Here the serpent embodies the demiurgic principle, the Creative Word. It also has a darker connotation, however. From a Christian perspective, the serpent is the great deceiver and his tongue is filled with lies. The second Beast of the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* is described as having the appearance of the Christ, with “two horns like those of a lamb” but when it opens its mouth, it speaks “like a dragon” (*Revelation 13.11*, Stern 1998:1545). The basilisk emerges from the mouth of the statue, like a giant tongue, and its presence brings death. The serpent of creation once again becomes an agent of evil and destruction, and Rowling’s text is clear about this primary context. The serpent-mouth symbol recurs with the *Dark Mark*, which is the mark of Voldemort’s Death Eaters. Figures 46 and 47 illustrate the serpent coming forth out of the mouth of a skull of death. The serpent contorts around itself and forms a figure of eight, or more correctly a twisted Möbius circle, which is a symbol of eternity and, in this context, immortality.



It is the aim of the Death Eaters to “conquer death”, and as such they employ the symbol of the serpent of eternity to embody not simply death, but the very victory over death.

So how does a serpent that symbolises formless existence, creation, and even the *lapis* fit within the context of Rowling’s narrative? Are the *Harry Potter* films providing an alternate reading of alchemy that is too universal, too ambivalent, and perhaps even contrary to Rowling’s vision? Rowling appears to have ossified the basilisk, and the serpent in general, as an archetypal evil, yet it should be understood that the creature is only evil because it is controlled by an evil master: Voldemort. Even the basilisk, as monochromatic as it appears, has a multiplicity of meanings.

### 5.3. The Basilisk

The basilisk functions not only as an enemy, but also as an obstacle and a limen of transition. The mythical hero is required to slay the monstrous dragon, whether it manifests as a serpent, a human tyrant, or some abstraction depiction of evil (Campbell 1993:337). This hero, who is also Messiah, a “Son of God” and world redeemer (Fletcher 1891:58), must crush the head of the serpent: the world spirit of death and deception, the enemy of God. The parallels between Harry Potter and the Christ cannot go unnoticed here. Harry Potter slays the monstrous serpent of death, the great beast akin to Satan, by thrusting the silver Sword of Gryffindor through the roof of its impending mouth (Figure 48). It is the head of the serpent, the seat of his authority, that is struck, and this preliminary victory foreshadows Harry’s ultimate victory over the serpent-tyrant Voldemort. In that ultimate confrontation, Harry sacrifices himself to Voldemort’s wand but he returns from across the limen of death, like the resurrected God, to herald the utter defeat of the evil world system. Harry Potter has returned a “true master of death” in the words of Albus Dumbledore (Rowling 2007:577).

In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry’s epic encounter with the basilisk occurs in a chamber that lies in the nether-womb of Hogwarts Castle, a symbolic Hades. As mentioned previously, it is a part of the heroic destiny to descend beneath the earth in anticipation of a rebirth and return. This concept is perfectly illustrated in the film interpretation of *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002). In order to enter the chamber, Harry Potter must pass through a sealed doorway (Figure 49). The doorway can only be opened when Harry speaks in Parseltongue, the language of serpents, and the door itself is depicted as a circle with seven serpents reminiscent of the spokes of a wheel. Unlike a wheel, the seven serpents do not emanate from its centre, but rather from the left, which is simply where the hinge of the door is. When Harry summons it to open, an eighth serpent emerges and circles the inner circumference of the door, passing the

seven heads of the other serpents. The eighth serpent completes the wheel, and in so doing, completes a symbolic cycle of return. As a point of symbolic departure, note that the Gnostic serpent, Agathodaimon, is said to have either seven or twelve rays around his head (Jung 1993:379-380), for seven is a perfect number, symbolising the completion of the work and the end of a cycle. Similarly the seal of St. Servatius (Figure 50) depicts the goddess of fate as a serpent with seven heads.



**Figure 48**

*Harry Potter fights the basilisk (Columbus 2002).*



**Figure 49**

*Harry Potter approaches the entrance to the chamber of secrets (Columbus 2002).*



**Figure 50**  
*Goddess of fate as serpent with seven heads.*  
 Seal of St. Servatius, Maastricht Cathedral  
 (Jung 1993:381).

The goddess has seven heads, for fate presides over all events, from creation to completion (termination). That the seven heads should be reminiscent of an archetypal wheel is intriguing. The wheel refers to the *opus circulatorium*, or circular work of alchemy. Generally it is a wheel with four spokes, symbolising the inter-relatedness of the four elements. It links back to the idea of the *prima materia* where the four elements are revealed before they are united into the *quintessence*. The circle of the wheel represents their unification: “The wheel of creation takes its rise from the *prima materia*, whence it passes to the simple elements” (Dorn, qtd in Jung 1993:381). Subsequently Harry’s descent to the cavernous chamber is his symbolic descent into the darkness and chaos of the *prima materia*.

The door through which Harry Potter passes has seven serpents, and not four. While four symbolises the foundation of the alchemical work, seven is a greater number, referring to the completion of creation, for “on the seventh day God was finished with his work which he had made” (*Genesis 2:2*, Stern 1998:2). The eighth serpent that circumscribes the other seven marks the beginning of a new cycle; it is seven *plus one*, completion into a new beginning. The serpent-barrier to the Chamber of Secrets thus expresses numerologically the idea that Harry Potter is about to enter a symbolic arena where one cycle is completed and another is begun. It is the announcement of the mythic idea of the heroic return: Harry’s symbolic death (from the venom of the basilisk), and his triumphal return to the surface (after being healed by Fawkes the Phoenix) occur beyond this gate. Hence it is an eternal gate that marks the threshold to Harry Potter’s symbolic Hades. It is in the subterranean chamber beyond this gate that Harry Potter overcomes the basilisk, the spirit of death and segregation that has infested Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry’s victory here is a symbolic victory over death. As the triumphant, resurrected Christ himself says, “I hold the keys to Death and *Sh’ol* [Hades]” (*Revelation 1:18*, Stern 1998:1534). This is the same Christ from whose mouth emerges the “sharp double-edged sword” (*Revelation 1:16, 19:15*, Stern 1998:1534, 1552) with which he

conquers the nations. It is not accidental that Rowling (2007:299) should describe the Sword of Gryffindor, used against the basilisk, as glowing like a “great silver cross”.

The destruction of the basilisk is the symbolic announcement of Harry’s destiny and the establishment of his authority. For this reason Rowling has ensured that Harry Potter meets with the basilisk at the symbolically ripe age of *twelve*. In biblical tradition twelve is the number of the elect, God’s chosen people. There are twelve patriarchs and twelve tribes of Israel, twelve jewels upon the *ephod* (breastplate) of the High Priest, twelve apostles and twelve gates in the Heavenly Jerusalem (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1043). In a sense then, twelve is the number of that which God has established and the numerical manifestation of his government. It is the pattern of his organisation, both on the earth and in the heavenlies. Twelve is associated with grace (Agrippa 1651b:[sp]), and it is “a perfect number, signifying *perfection of government, or of governmental perfection*” according to the Christian writer EW Bullinger (1967:253). It is insightful of Rowling to make the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix, the anti-Voldemort movement, at *Twelve* Grimmauld Place. Upon the death of Sirius Black, Harry Potter receives Twelve Grimmauld Place as his inheritance (Rowling 2005:51).

In addition, the sun, who governs the day, and the moon and the stars, having dominion over the night, do so by passage through the twelve signs of the Zodiac. This 360° turn (12 x 30°) completes the circle of the heavens (Bullinger 1967:253). Twelve is thus the number “by which space and time are divided”; it is the product of the three levels of the universe multiplied by the four cardinal points (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1043). It speaks *of the order and structure of time and space*. Harry Potter moves into a symbolic governmental authority at the age of twelve, epitomised by killing the serpent of chaos and establishing the organised structure of the “Kingdom of God”.

Most importantly, twelve also signifies the fulfilment of the *completed cycle*. In the Tarot deck the twelfth major arcanum is the *Hanging Man*, who symbolises the end of the cycle: man turned upside down, hanging by his foot. It is a symbol of the sacrifice, a premonition of Harry Potter’s death, but most of all it is an esoteric reversal of all things (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:471,1043).<sup>29</sup> The physical body is inverted and the esoteric initiation can begin. The *new*

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<sup>29</sup> It is intriguing to contrast the symbolism of the Hanging Man in the Tarot deck to the Epigram of the Hermaphrodite attributed to Mathieu de Vendôme (ca. 1150) (qtd in Jung 1989:81):

And when I was born, I was a hermaphrodite.  
Asked how I was to meet my end, the goddess replied: By arms;  
Mars: On the cross; Phoebus: By water. All were right.  
A tree overshadowed the waters, I climbed it;  
the sword I had with me slipped, and I with it.  
My foot caught in the branches, my head hung down in the stream;  
And I – male, female, and neither – suffered by water, weapon, and cross.

*cycle* begins with the thirteenth card of the tarot, which is *Death*. After the *Hanged Man* it symbolises rebirth, for “the death depicted here is not death of the physical body, but the destruction which threatens spiritual existence, if initiation does not save us from annihilation” (Rijnberk, qtd in Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:278). It is a case of *mors janua vitae*: Death is the Gate of Life (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:278).

This is the ultimate alchemical (if not Orthodox Christian) understanding of the serpent. If the monster-dragon is the holdfast, the “keeper of the past” then it must be slain if the hero wishes to progress. The Great Serpent, who is actually the symbol of transformation and the cyclical relationship of life and death, has become ossified in its meaning as a tyrant of destruction. If the hero-deed is intended to be a continuous “shattering of the crystallizations of the moment” (Campbell 1993:337), then the serpent of death must be slaughtered in order to again become the principle of life. The basilisk, perhaps more than any other serpent icon within the films, embodies the totality of this idea.

The hero who destroys the monster-guardian is entitled to eat from the fruit of the Cosmic Tree, the golden apples of the Hesperides (Brabazon 2003:[sp]). The monster that guards this boon is transfixed as a momentary (and only a momentary) manifestation of death. Its overcoming or departure reveals the way to eternal life: the *lapis* of the Philosophers (*cf.* Footnote 13, pg. 29). The serpent that was in danger of remaining a petrified, static sign is permitted to die and be reformed as a dynamic, sliding signifier. The monster-guardian becomes the serpent that marks the threshold of revelation. This concept is clearly illustrated in the writing of the alchemist Zosimos of Panopolos (2003:52), who reveals that the alchemical serpent is a doorstep to the temple of alchemy:

A serpent lies before the entry guarding the temple; seize him and sacrifice him. Skin him and, taking his flesh and bones, separate his parts; then reuniting the members with the bones at the entry of the temple, make of them a stepping stone, mount thereon, and enter. You will find there what you seek.

Therefore the hero has to fight the serpent to release man from his fallen state, which is a lesser condition (Brabazon 2003:[sp]). The death of the serpent marks the evolution to a higher spiritual state, and the basilisk becomes a multiplicity of meaning. It is a trial, an obstacle, the tool of a vicious tyrant, but ultimately the *way to the lapis*. In fact, in alchemical circles the basilisk is sometimes regarded as a metaphor for the *lapis* itself. The fabulous basilisk is hatched from a cock’s egg by a serpent, recalling the myth of Ophion and the Cosmic Egg. Simply by casting its eyes upon any living thing, it kills it. Hence the basilisk is able to kill the



base metal “in the blink of an eye”<sup>30</sup> and tinge it instantaneously to silver or gold (Abraham 1998:16-17). Hence the basilisk is the *lapis*. The reader need only recall the students that were perversely turned to *stone* by its transfixative powers. Like the symbol of *Python* from the page containing the recipe for the Polyjuice Potion (Figure 43), the basilisk is *Mercurius*, the universal agent of transformation. It is both beginning and end of the alchemical process, like the wheel of the seven or eight serpents that mark the door to the Chamber of Secrets.

The battle between Fawkes, the phoenix, and the basilisk has already been mentioned as a battle between the fire of creativity and the spirit of death, and as the antagonism of elemental fire and elemental water. More importantly, however, it is a contest between two symbols of the eternal cycle of life and death. Both the phoenix and the serpent embody simultaneously the destructive and creative principles of the *lapis*. However, the serpent is commonly reviled because it brings death, while the phoenix is revered as the hope of rebirth. The serpent usually symbolises *Mercurius* and the *opus alchymicum* during its early chthonic stages, hence the black appearance of the basilisk (Figure 48). The phoenix represents the same *opus*, but towards the end of its cycle, its multiplication and “culmination” as the *ultima materia*: the *lapis*. Hence the phoenix displays its proud plumage of red and gold (Figure 14). Quite simply, this battle illustrates the culmination of the alchemical *rubedo* over the alchemical *nigredo*. In their fighting, the phoenix and the basilisk are united as a quarrelling couple, and their hybridisation is a visual cue of Harry Potter’s quest for the *lapis*.

For all the metaphors and puns that can be evoked, the serpent is clearly not a symbol cast in stone. Nor does the adamantine nature of the red stone of the philosophers mean that it always emerges as the same rigid symbol. As much as it is desirable to suggest that the *lapis* marks an absolute end to the alchemical work, the reality is not that simple. According to Joseph Campbell (1974:256):

The aim of the alchemists, then, was to achieve not a terminal perfection but a process ever continuing, of which their “stone,” the *lapis philosophorum*, should become at once the model and the catalyst: a process whereby and wherein all pairs of opposites – eternity and time, heaven and hell, male and female, youth and age – should be brought together by something “midway between perfected and unperfected bodies”

In a sense, the *lapis* becomes the ideal hybrid of *beginning* and *ending*. The signification of the *lapis* is always transmuting because alchemy, like the mythic serpent, the enclosed ouroboros, and the eternal phoenix, is never a culminated process. The *serpent-lapis* is a reminder of the Indian Vishnu, floating on the cosmic ocean while reclined upon the body of the abyssal serpent

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<sup>30</sup> “Look I will tell you a secret – not all of us will die! But we will all be changed [*transformed*]! It will take but a moment, the blink of an eye, at the final *shofar* [trumpet]. For the *shofar* will sound, and the dead will be raised to live forever, and we too will be changed” (*1Corinthians 15:51-52*, Stern 1998:1438).

Ananta, whose name quite simply means “Unending” (Campbell 1974:7).

Rowling (2007:605) is acutely aware that alchemy is a perpetual process. The end of *The Deathly Hallows* does not signify the end of the alchemical work. Instead, it announces the arrival of the new orphan: Teddy Lupin. The philosophical orphan is another name for the *lapis*. Since the *lapis* is born from the death of its parents, it is said to be an orphan, fostered by the alchemist until it reaches maturity (Abraham 1998:139). It is also called “orphan” because of its uniqueness (Jung 1989:17). Harry Potter is the orphan of his series, but in the final chapter it is revealed that he has adopted the orphaned son of Tonks and Remus Lupin, who were both killed in the battle against Voldemort. The cycle thus continues, and Rowling symbolises it by ending the series with the mention of another orphan, Theodore: the “gift from God” (*Behind the name* [sa]:[sp]).



## CHAPTER 6

### *Orbis Unum: The Stone as Messiah*

#### 6.1. Introduction

Remaining with the theoretical idea of circularity and signification, this chapter shifts focus from the serpent as a signifier of the lapis, to a deliberation on the relationship between the lapis and the eternal sphere. As a literal depiction of circularity, the sphere is another visual cue of the *lapis* within the *Harry Potter* films. As elementary as the symbol may appear, its syntagmatic relationship with the *lapis* reveals multiple levels of signification. The relationship unveils the totality of the dimensions of the alchemical symbolism within the *Harry Potter* films. This argumentation extends the *lapis* from being a mere signifier of “immortality” to becoming a transcendental ideal: a symbol of God, creation, and man redeemed. Subsequently this chapter also focuses upon the *lapis* as a Messianic signifier, highlighting the relationship between Harry Potter, as heroic protagonist, and the *lapis* as the embodiment of Messianic destiny. This relationship has been implicit in Harry Potter’s heroic quest to slay the demonic serpent, as described in Chapter Five. In discussing the symbolic sphere, it is now possible to unveil the full extent of *lapis*’s signification of Messianic destiny, and deal with the topic explicitly.

Similar to the mythic serpent, the sphere is a perpetual symbol in the *Harry Potter* films. It may be represented with or without wings. When reduced to two dimensions, the sphere becomes a circle, thus extending the hermeneutic premise of this study. The sphere concisely represents both the perfection for which the alchemical work strives, and the inherent circularity of the work itself. Subsequently the closed form of the sphere or circle conveys ideas of eternity and cyclical return. It can signify the earth, the heavenlies, or even the entire creation. Through its association with the process of creation, the sphere, as a cosmic “egg”, is associated with the chthonic serpent. This has been elaborated upon in Chapter Four. The symbolism of the sphere, however, is not limited to its association with the cosmic egg. The sphere is such a culturally

pervasive icon that it occurs repeatedly, whether as the small round “rememberall”<sup>31</sup> that Neville Longbottom carries (Figure 51), the stereotypical crystal ball of diviners (Figure 52), a prophetic orb in *The Order of the Phoenix* (Figure 53), or as a watery ball that Dumbledore uses to trap Voldemort during their epic battle at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix* (Figure 54).



**Figure 51**  
*Neville’s Rememberall* (Columbus 2001).



**Figure 52**  
*A crystal ball from Harry’s divination lessons*  
(Cuaron 2004).

In each of these instances, the sphere is a symbol of eternity, perfection or alchemical renewal. When the rememberall in Figure 51 is looked at closely, small markings on the surface of the glass are discernable. Closest to the holder’s thumb is a circular form that evolves out of a spinning centre. The centre point rotates around an axis and forms a symbol reminiscent of the

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<sup>31</sup> The “rememberall” is a small circular object that turns red and whistles when the user has forgotten something.

ancient swastika. The form is not that of a true swastika, for it is a more curvilinear shape, evoking the figure of the black and white teardrops that form the eastern *yin-yang* symbol. Nevertheless, this symbol illustrates four lines emerging from a central point, like the spokes of a wheel. Similarly the archetypal swastika depicts a rotary movement around a fixed centre. It is a cyclical symbol of manifestation, activity and perpetual regeneration, and as such it is associated with the mythic world redeemer. The swastika is basically a cross (having four arms) extended and multiplied by four. Its numerical product is therefore sixteen (4 x 4), which symbolises the evolving power of the universe (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:956). Ultimately the swastika-like symbol, sprouting into an ever-widening circular loop, represents the cosmic idea of the rotary wheel, manifesting around a fixed point, the “*fiat lux*”.<sup>32</sup> The circle widens concentrically as the process evolves through eternity.



**Figure 53**  
*The Prophecy* (Yates 2007).

It is within the rememberall that an opaque red cloud forms to remind the owner that he or she has forgotten something. This idea of a misty, or cloud-like substance contained within the sphere is also illustrated in crystal balls used in the divination classroom (Figure 52), as well as the sphere containing the prophecy pertaining to Harry Potter and Voldemort (Figure 53). The presence of the mist within the globes is in part a reference to the title of the prescribed textbook by Professor Trelawney: *Unfogging the Future* by Cassandra Vablatsky. Yet in each instance the “mist” reminds the viewer of an active presence within the sphere, some primordial substance that is formless but not without content. It is a primordial matter that has potential, either to release prophetic musings or, in the case of the divination balls, to show glimpses of the future. The association of the sphere with divination is an interesting one. The circle has

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<sup>32</sup> The principle of the divine creation of light, taken from the book of Genesis: “Then God said, ‘let there be light’” (*Genesis 1.3*, Stern 1998:1).



long been an emblem of cyclical and universal time, a manifestation of eternity. It is “completely self-contained, has no beginning or end, is finished and perfect, the circle is the symbol of the Absolute” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:197,199). The sphere culminates its perfection by adding a third dimension. Therefore the entire manifestation of space and time is symbolically held within its form, and it is for this reason that it facilitates divination. To look into the future is to behold the universe as an eternal mechanism. The ideal shape for holding such a powerful vision of the future would be the perfect sphere of eternity.

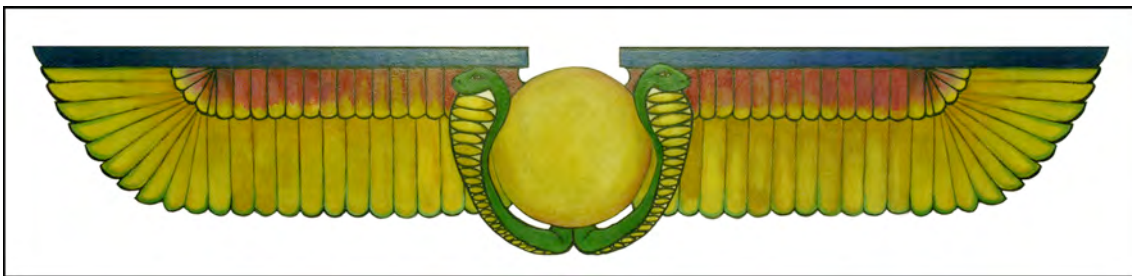


**Figure 54**  
*Dumbledore traps Voldemort in a  
 Chaotic ball of water (Yates 2007).*

The association of the sphere with primordial elements is most clearly seen when Albus Dumbledore battles Voldemort, trapping him momentarily within a spinning globe of water (Figure 54). The waters are taken from the fountain in the Ministry of magic, and in alchemy the fountain is a metaphor for the mercurial waters of dissolution (Abraham 1998:81). Voldemort, the archetypal serpent, is subsequently contained in the chthonic waters with which the serpent is usually associated. The undifferentiated mass of waters symbolise infinite potential (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1081), but in Voldemort’s case may hint towards the threat of reabsorption, back into the *prima materia* of the black cauldron from which he was spawned at the end of *The Goblet of Fire* (Figure 8). Such reabsorption, symbolic or literal, does not occur, but the image is a potent reference to the alchemical idea of a watery globe of chaos (Jung 1993:372). The same amorphous idea is maintained by the mists within the crystal balls used for divination. The waters spun into a globe indicate that these are the eternal waters, existing outside of time. Even during such a sumptuous visual battle of wands, archetypal symbols are evoked, whether by accident or design.

## 6.2. The Winged Sphere

Once the mythic sphere is equipped with wings, it gains an entirely new symbolic potential. It retains its immortal nature, but is made to appear even more divine. Wings are associated with archetypal release and ascendancy. The divine Egyptian Sun is a winged globe (Figure 55). It is regarded as “the essential manifestation, the visible face, the ‘Eye’ of the One and Only God” (D’Alviella 1894:218). This sun is also said to be the *udjat*, or Eye of Horus. Horus became known as the defender and avenger of his father Osiris, who was murdered and mutilated at the hand of his brother Set (Budge 1973a:149). It is Horus’s Eye that purifies and resurrects the deceased Osiris, and completes him by giving him a new soul (Budge 1973a:84,136,115). Osiris comes to represent the body, while the Eye of Horus, the winged solar disk, represents the soul: “When the Osiris [body] of a man has entered into heaven as a living soul, he is regarded as one of those who ‘have eaten the eye of Horus’; he walks among the living ones, he becomes “God, the Son of God” (Budge 1999:83-84).

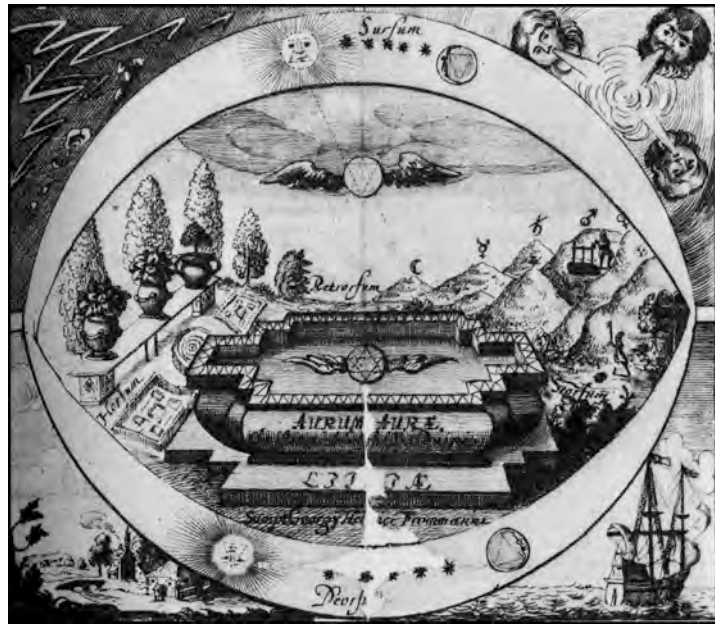


**Figure 55**

*The winged solar disk of the Egyptians*

(Wasserman 2005:86).

It is not surprising then that the *anima mundi* or world soul, also regarded as the Spirit of Life (Blavatsky 1925a:365; Jung 1993:325), should be depicted as a winged globe. “According to St Gregory of Nyssa, if God, the archetype, has wings, then the soul, created in his image, is also winged. While it may have lost its wings as a result of Original Sin, it has the power to regain them in the very tempo of its transformation” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1117). These ideas hint at the core of the alchemical symbolism of the winged globe. In Bladuinus’ *Aurum hermeticum*, the eternal *lapis* itself is depicted as a winged sphere, reflected in the fountain of life (Figure 56).



**Figure 56**

The winged sphere (*aurum aurea*) as the end-product of the *opus*, from Balduinus, *Aurum hermeticum*, 1625 (Jung 1993:385).

The sphere is also intimately associated with the perfect deity. Jacob Böhme (qtd in Roob 1005:667) describes the immortal Godhead as a spherical set of wheels, rotating inside of one another: “They are forever giving birth one to another, and it is as if when one turned one wheel, there were seven wheels inside one another...”. These wheels manifest the eyes of God, as is visible in Figure 57. They are seven in number because it is recorded by the prophet Zechariah (4.10, Stern 1998:775) that the seven candles of the lampstand (Figure 58), represent “the eyes of [the Lord] that range about all over the earth”. These eyes “move here and there throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong on behalf of those who are wholehearted toward him” (2 *Chronicles* 16.9, Stern 1998:1198). Within the *Zohar* (in Roob 2005:117) the human eye is imagined to be an image of the world, whose colours are arranged in concentric spheres. The white of the eye equates with the ocean, while the other two colours denote the mainland and the centre of the world. The macrocosmic idea of a universe inscribed in concentric spheres is thus applied to the microcosmic principle, and the deity is mirrored in the eye of man. Similarly, the frontispiece to the first volume of Robert Fludd’s *Utriusque Cosmi* (Figure 59) depicts the perfect man in the form of a circle. He stands over the four inner spheres of the four humours of man, which correspond to the four elements, and is contained within the sphere of the zodiac. The goat-footed deity is Chronos-Saturn, who unrolls the outer perimeter of the macrocosmic sphere: the universal year (Roob 2005:543). This image illustrates the intimate connection between the microcosm and the macrocosm, engaged as distinct manifestations of the same universal principles.



**Figure 57**

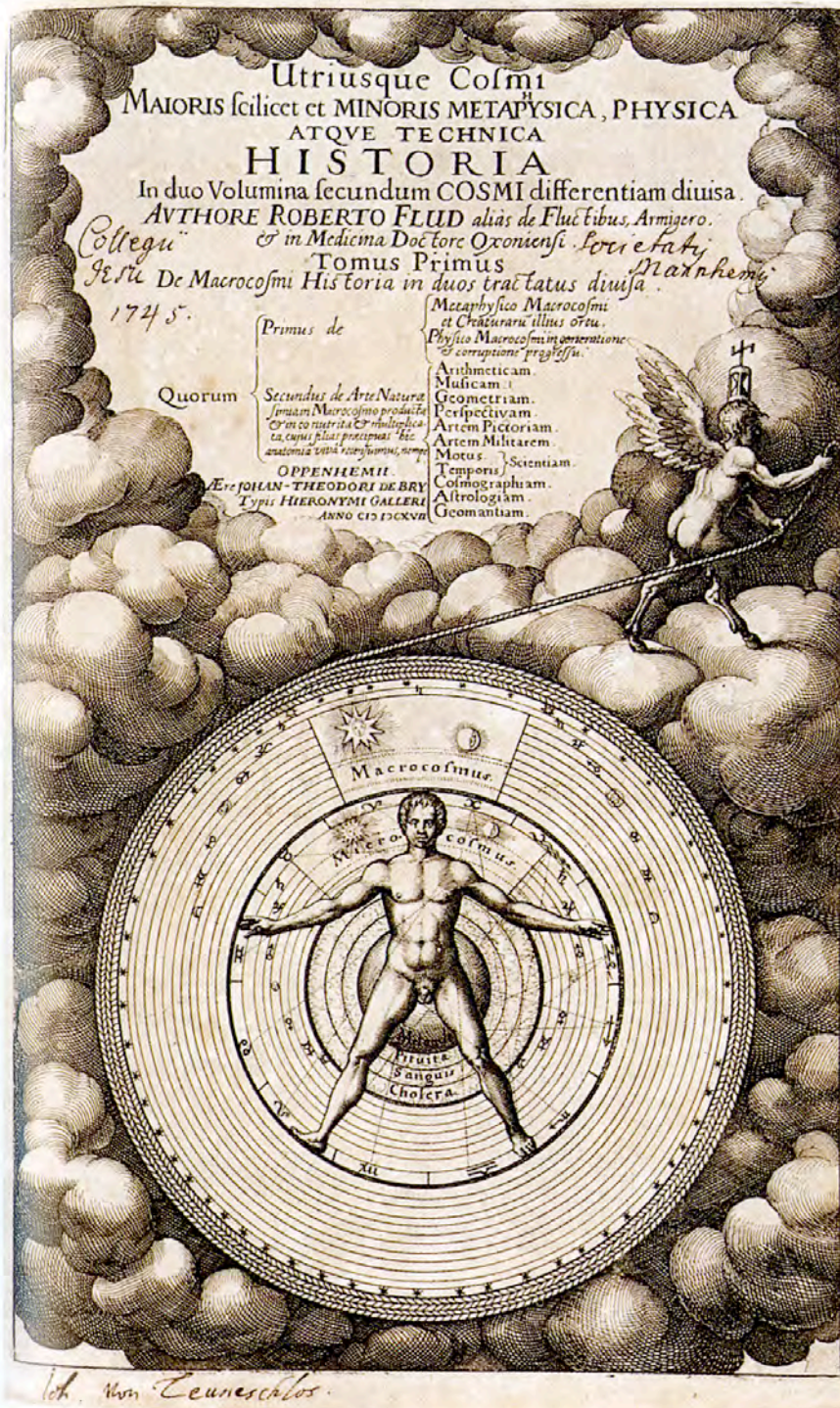
The Godhead as a wheel of seven wheels. From Jacob Böhme, *Theosophische Werke*, Amsterdam 1682 (Roob 2005:667).



**Figure 58**

Hermes-Mercury with the lampstand . From Achilles Bocchius, *Symbolicarum quaestionum*, Bologna, 1555 (Roob 2005:13).





**Figure 59**

Frontispiece to Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi* Vol I, Oppenheim, 1617 (Roob 2005:543).



Considering all of this symbolism, the sphere ultimately comes to symbolise the *interconnection of all*: the deity, creation and man. It is a symbol of the Absolute God, the Sun as an embodiment of this principle, the *lapis*, the *anima mundi*, and the human soul (*cf.* Section 3.2.2). Like the serpent it is a multiplicity of symbolism. It is beginning (chaos) and end (*lapis*); it is eternity (beginning and ending as One), as well as a manifestation of the Eternal Absolute, the God who exists outside of time. Each manifestation points to the other in a staggered system: from circular chaos to the immortal *lapis*; from the *lapis* to the eternal Christ; and back to the primeval Word who “was appointed before the world, before the start, before the earth’s beginnings” (*Proverbs 8.23*, Stern 1998:952, Freedman & Simon 1939:1-4). Note what the Gnostic alchemist Zosimos of Panopolos (qtd in Jung 1993:360-361) writes:

The Son of God has become all things for the sake of devout souls: in order to draw the soul forth from the dominion of Heimarmene [fate, natural necessity] into the [realm of the] incorporeal, behold he has become all – God, angel, and man capable of suffering. For having power in all, he can become all as he wills; and he obeys the Father inasmuch as he penetrates all bodies and illuminates the mind of each soul, spurring it on to follow him up to the blessed region where it was before the beginning of corporeal things, yearning and led by him into the light.

Similarly the *lapis* occupies all the levels of its own significance. It becomes its own *supplément*,<sup>33</sup> being simultaneously the Christ as Creative Logos, the transformed man, the red stone, the universal elixir, and the perfected *Mercurius* as the goal of his own transformation. When this process is internalised, the symbolic layering extends to the alchemist himself. As Jung explains (1993:355):

Had the alchemist succeeded in forming any concrete idea of his unconscious contents, he would have been obliged to recognize that he had taken the place of Christ – or, to be more exact, that he, regarded not as ego but as self, had taken over the work of redeeming not man but God. He would then have had to recognize not only himself as the equivalent of Christ, but Christ as the symbol of the self.

This is not so much a case of dislocation, of one sign displacing another. The signifying relationship is more complex than this. Rather than to assume that the alchemist *is* the Christ, in the sense that he replaces the Christ, it should be understood that the alchemist is the microcosmic *manifestation* of the macrocosmic Christ, and the universal principle of death, rebirth and world redemption. Both are faces or masks of the same “ultimate signified” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004:127,129), a co-substantial chain of signification manifested at

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<sup>33</sup> The context of the French word *supplément* is borrowed and amended from the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. Barbara Johnson (in Derrida 2004:xii) provides the following explanation of the term in her introduction to Derrida’s *Dissemination*. In French, the word *supplément* has dual meanings. It can mean both “an addition” and “a substitute.” As it is used in this study, the noun *supplément* indicates that symbolic meaning may be added to something that is already present, in which case it becomes superfluous, or alternately may replace something that is not present, becoming essential. On both the level of signifier and signified, there is a play around the ‘concrete’ dividing lines of excess and lack, compensation and corruption (Derrida 2004:xiii).

different strata or expressed at different intensities. This is the hermeneutic lesson taught by alchemy. Opening up the hermeneutic circle of its meaning, the values inscribed by its circumference are allowed to flow into and out of one another. There are distinct possibilities, “parts” of meaning manifesting as different elements, but they are indefatigably joined together by their whole. All the symbols of the text intertwine, searching for their causal integration under the assumption that the text, and the archetypal sign, aims for a unified meaning. Subsequently, Jung’s comment on the relationship between the deity and the alchemist should not be considered to imply that the alchemist *is* God, though through a causal relationship he can become *like* God, *one with* God. As the mythic founder of alchemy, Hermes Trismegistus teaches, “They... having become powers, they *enter into* god. This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god” (*Corpus Hermeticum 1.26*, Copenhagen 1995:6, emphasis added).

Subsequently the majority of alchemical signs revert to the same key principles at different stages. Nowhere is this idea more clearly illustrated than in the idea of the sphere, staggered upon itself in a concentric system like the layers of an onion. It remains the universal symbol of eternity, and this is why even the serpent, as potent as it is, assumes the shape of a circle when it devours itself in a representation of cosmic reincarnation. The sphere therefore stands as the epitome of visual hybridisation, swallowing and disgorging meaning through the limen of its unbreakable circumference. It is the *lapis* in its entire chain of signification: Creator-created, God-man, Eternity-imminence. The winged sphere evokes the entire body of alchemical theory, from the lowest primal beginnings as the rotating wheel of the elements, to the highest describable signified: the full illumination of the spiritual Sun: the Face of God (Abraham 1998:174; Derrida 2004:96). It is the true *lapis*, no longer manifested as a physical stone but embodied as a transcendental principle.

### 6.3. The Golden Snitch

The most visible representation of this staggered signification in the *Harry Potter* films is the golden Snitch (Figure 60). The Snitch is a small golden ball with wings that is used during the wizard sport of quidditch. It is one of four balls used in the sport, but it is the most important as capturing the Snitch ends the game, and the team who captures it is awarded 150 points. Each team has seven players, and the seventh player is called the “seeker”. It is the responsibility of the seeker to capture the golden Snitch before the other team’s seeker does. As Harry Potter is the seeker for the Gryffindor quidditch team, he is strategically the *seventh* on their team. The reappearance of the strategic numbers four and seven within the sport hint at its alchemical and cosmological significance.



**Figure 60**

*The golden snitch* (Columbus 2001).

The Snitch itself resembles the winged globe, and it is a perfect metaphor for the *lapis philosophorum*, the goal of Harry Potter's quest. The Snitch travels quickly, and its golden resplendence reminds the viewer of the spiritual light of illumination. The eye, and subsequently the winged globe, "is a symbol as well as an allegory of consciousness" (Jung 1989:53). The term "seeker" is actually a spiritual designation for an adept on the path of light who is looking for religious illumination. In esoteric circles, "seekers" are those beings that hunt down and capture any shard of light that may have entered the astral plane. This astral plane is, as the name implies, quite simply the plane of the stars, a plane of formation outside of the physical reality that can be reached by a phenomenon known as astral projection (Dunn 1995:15). It is understood that during astral projection consciousness is transferred from the physical body to the astral, or etheric, body inside of man (Farrar & Farrar 1984:213, sec. II). This is commonly referred to as an "out-of-body experience". The phenomenon is not uncommon amongst the alchemists of China, who reportedly flew beyond the physical world on the back of a dragon, similar to shamans on their soul-voyages. At the end of the journey, an anonymous alchemist writes that he "attained the Clarity | And entered the precinct of the Great Beginning" (Marshall 2002:33,34). The Snitch, as the *lapis* and as an eternal ball of light, is therefore symbolic of the path that leads to enlightenment.

As a winged globe, the Snitch is also the perfect representation of the soul. In Gnostic understanding the soul is considered to be a divine scintilla of light, exiled in matter and subject to the machinations of external dark forces (Jung 1989:55; Roob 2005:18). The Gnostic teachings expose how the divine light of the cosmos can be released from the body and its subjection to fate. It is the role of the Gnostic saviour to awaken people who are under the spell of the demiurge so that they may return to the beginning, when they were one with God

(Barnstone & Meyer 2006:4,7). The Gnostic saviour is thus a call to revelation and knowledge. He is not a sacrificial lamb, in the Orthodox Christian sense. By comparison Harry Potter, the “Chosen One” (Rowling 2005:43), is more than just a Gnostic revealer, for he dies for the salvation of his friends – a particularly Christian theme. The symbolic ball of light that he chases while on his quidditch broom is his own self-awareness, the scintilla of his alchemical unveiling.

The golden Snitch clearly becomes more than just a shallow visual simile for the *lapis*. Its spherical, resplendent nature hints at the divine gold of the alchemist, the etheric light, the Gnostic soul or the *anima mundi*. The golden Snitch symbolises all of these things simultaneously, all the while retaining its greatest signification: as the soul of the solar god, a visible manifestation of the invisible absolute. The Snitch is the very symbol of the Egyptian resurrection, for the archetypal winged globe is the Eye of Horus, dazzling in its golden brilliance as the celestial sun. There is much symbolism to suggest that the Harry Potter novels are influenced, at least in part, by Egyptian mythology. The battle between Horus and Set, often reduced to a battle between light and disorder, is a prominent theme within Egyptian mythology. In a sense, Horus is the manifestation of the Messianic principle. He too battles the great serpent of darkness, Apophis, who is the enemy of the solar disk, and it is said that he “tramples” upon it, kicking it in the mouth with his foot (Budge 1973a:143). Similarly when Set is manifested as an “evil” chthonic serpent he wages war on both Eyes of Horus: the sun and the moon, the principles of light (Budge 1973a:388; Oden 1979:358). These same eyes, when removed and planted, were said to form two tall lotus plants which illuminated the whole earth (Oden 1979:356).

It is Horus who is called *the Lord of men* (Budge 1973a:147), the god of the skies, and the Lord of the whole earth. He is the vanquisher of evil, but most importantly he is “*Heru-netch-her-tefef*”: Horus the Advocate or Avenger of his father. (Budge 1973a:149; 1999:389). Thus Aleister Crowley ([saj]:[sp]) calls Horus the “crowned and conquering child”. The murder of Osiris at the hands of Set does not go unanswered, for Horus avenges him with furious rage. Rowling (2005:476-477) implies a similar mythology in the construction of Harry Potter. In *The Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore asks Harry, “If Voldemort had never murdered your father, would he have imparted in you a furious desire for revenge?” Note that Harry’s mother’s loving *sacrifice* is considered a metaphysically distinct event from the *murder* of his father. Harry James Potter becomes the advocate of his father, forever having his father’s name, James, inscribed amongst his own as a reminder of his heritage.

This relationship between Harry Potter and the mythic Horus is extended even further when the signification of the golden Snitch is taken into context. The Snitch, as mentioned, is a visual

representation of the solar disk, which is the soul of Horus. When Horus fed his soul to his deceased father Osiris, he was resurrected, and similarly the Egyptian man who enters the heavens is said to have “eaten the eye of Horus” (Budge 1999:83-4). In Harry Potter’s very first quidditch match he captures the golden Snitch in his mouth, nearly swallowing it. In the *Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:113), Harry Potter is bequeathed this same snitch by Albus Dumbledore with a cryptic engraving: ‘I open at the close’. According to Rowling (2007:108), Snitches have “flesh memories”, meaning that they can identify the first human to lay hands upon them. Only Harry Potter is able to open the contents hidden inside of this particular Snitch. Just before he is about to sacrifice himself to Voldemort, Harry touches the Snitch to his lips and says “I am about to die”. The Snitch opens and reveals the black *resurrection stone*, with which he is afforded the power to bring back the deceased (Rowling 2007:559).

Rowling brings her symbolism full circle: the Snitch, as the golden globe, is not only a symbol of Harry Potter’s impending spiritual illumination, it is also his means to resurrect his loved ones if he so chooses. It houses within it the symbolic soul of the sun god, with its power to overcome death. As Aleister Crowley ([sa]h:[sp]) admonishes, “The Aeon of Horus is here: and its first flower may well be this: that, freed of the obsession of the doom of the Ego in Death... the best men again set out... upon the Path of the Wise”. Horus, the “crowned and conquering sun”, the great I AM, whose form is a “cube... surrounded by a sphere” (Crowley [sa]g:[p]), thus becomes the king of the new era, where death is finally defeated, for “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (Rowling 2007:268; *1 Corinthians 15:26*, Stern 1998:1437).

In this regard it is interesting to note an ancient prophecy, ca. 130 BCE, aptly titled *The Potter’s Oracle*, which promises that God will send a king from the Sun (Copenhaver 1995:xxix):

In this generation there will be war and murder, which will destroy brothers, and husbands and wives... And then [,after Egypt is restored, it] will increase, when for fifty-five years he who is well disposed, the king dispenser of good, *born of the Sun*, established by the great goddess Isis, is at hand, so that those surviving *will pray for the resurrection of those who died before*, in order that they might share in the good things (*Apology of the Potter* [sa]:[sp], emphasis added).

Harry Potter strategically “descends” from the heavens upon his millennial *Nimbus 2000* broomstick to capture the Snitch in his mouth. A nimbus, also known as a halo, is another solar image and it is usually depicted as a radiance around the head or body. The nimbus is Harry’s symbolic association with kingship and his Messianic destiny, for it is a symbol of the kingly crown, holiness, divinity and spiritual enlightenment. It “marks the diffusion and the expansion beyond its physical bounds of that centre of spiritual energy believed to reside in the soul” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:464-5).



Similarly, Harry's magic wand is made of "holly and phoenix feather" (Rowling 1997:65). The phoenix is the avian symbol of the Sun god, who inhabits the grove of the Sun. It is also called "King" (Harrison 1960:173,175). According to Robert Graves (1999:175), "Holly" means "holy", and in the *Holly-Tree Carol*, it is revealed that "Of all the trees that are in the wood | The Holly bears the *crown*" (emphasis added). The Holly tree is commonly associated with the birth and passion of Jesus Christ: the white flowers symbolise purity; the blood red berries, sacrifice; and sharp thorns, tribulation. Like the Snitch that represents the light of the solar deity, when Harry Potter takes his predestined wand into his hand for the first time, he is bathed in a prophetic shower of light (Figure 61). Even Harry Potter's name is symbolic of his golden Kingship. Harry can be either a mediaeval form of Hendry, which means "home ruler", or else an abbreviation of Harold, meaning the "leader of the army", a warring prince (*Behind the Name* [sa]:[sp]). In this context, the Snitch comes to symbolise the sphere of Harry Potter's authority.



**Figure 61**

*Harry Potter is bathed in light as he grasps his predestined wand (Columbus 2001).*

The Snitch is therefore the culmination of Rowling's signification and reveals the full extent of the alchemical paradigm. It is the perfected *lapis* and a precursor of Harry's imminent victory over death. More importantly, the symbolism of the Snitch reveals that Harry Potter is Rowling's symbolic Messiah. He is a syncretic amalgamation of the attributes of the Christ and the Egyptian Horus, a veritable emblem of the universality of alchemy. Just as the Christ is regarded in alchemy as the perfect hermaphrodite, being wholly God and wholly man, so too Horus is considered to be of both sexes (Blavatsky 1925a:72), notably containing in his two eyes the disk of *Sol* and the disk of *Luna*. In similar fashion, Harry Potter is the Slytherin-

Gryffindor androgyne, a revelation of the alchemical harmony at the core of Rowling's novels. To the survivors of Voldemort's reign of terror, he is naturally considered "their leader and symbol, their saviour and guide" (Rowling 2007:596).

The strongly syncretic nature of Harry Potter as a symbol explains why this study has chosen to focus on the broader mythological paradigms of alchemy, and not merely its Christian, European manifestation. An emphasis upon Egyptian mythology, in particular, unveils a great deal of supplementary symbolism within the *Harry Potter* novels that would have been excluded in an Orthodox Christian reading. The Christian saviour speaks of an unyielding victory, the ultimate redemption of creation from its bondage to decay (*Romans 8.20-21*, Stern 1998:1410). The Christ is the "Lamb slaughtered before the world was founded" (*Revelation 13:8*, Stern 1998:1545), an eternal salvation manifested as a singularity in time and placed once upon the cross.

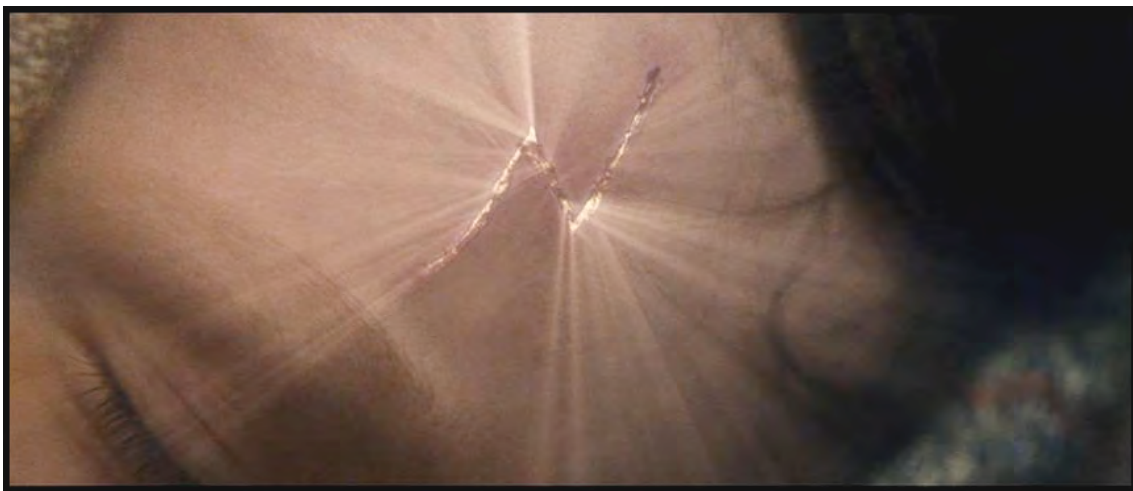
The Egyptian Horus, like the Christ to which he was so frequently compared, is also the balsam of the world. As the reborn Osiris, Horus is the Nile river emerging to rejuvenate the whole land (Witt 1971:15). He is established as the Pantocrator of the world, the one who triumphed over the chaos of Set (Witt 1971:20,50). This conflict, however, is re-enacted in a cyclical fashion throughout eternity, for Horus repeatedly battles with his brother/uncle Set. Within Egyptian mythology this is a logical necessity, for Horus is not a singularity in time but the totality of time manifested in circles. He is reborn each year on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January (Witt 1971:211),<sup>34</sup> when the spherical sun begins its ascent from the gloom of the winter solstice. Subsequently the redemptive act of Horus is never entirely complete. Echoing the conundrums of alchemy, the Horus-Messiah speaks of the endless cycle of the *opus alchymicum*, where the *lapis* is both the model and catalyst of a process of perpetual perfection (Campbell 1974:256). It is a reminder of the cyclical death and return of the hero, and the passing of the mantle from one generational hero to the next. For the alchemist, who sees himself as a hero to Nature, it is therefore essential that he continue the redemptive work of the Christ, making himself an "unspotted vessel" in order to "realize the idea 'Christ' on a plane far transcending a mere imitation of him" (Jung 1989:35). As Carl Jung (1989:34) notes:

Whereas the Christian belief is that man is freed from sin by the redemptory act of Christ, the alchemist was evidently of the opinion that the "restitution to the likeness of original and incorrupt nature" had still to be accomplished by the art, and this can only mean that Christ's work of redemption was incomplete.

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<sup>34</sup> Aleister Crowley ([sa]i:[sp]) claims that Horus is the child who "dieth not, nor is reborn, but goeth radiant ever upon His Way" As such the aspect of Horus is completely distinct from his father, Osiris, who represents the patriarchal era of death and rebirth. This study still views Horus and Osiris as interrelated deities and thus agrees with the assessment of Witt (1971:211) that Horus, as Sun, is perpetually reborn just as his father, Osiris, is perpetually slaughtered.

The alchemical resuscitation of the world, and of the Self, highlights that the “Christ” is formed within him like a shining *lapis*. Éliphas Lévi (2001:9) believed that when the Astral Light is fixed around a centre through a process of condensation, it becomes the very *lapis* of alchemy. In this esoteric evaluation the light of the cosmos is internalised, like Harry Potter swallowing the golden sphere of the Snitch. As Alice Bailey (1951b:68) recalls, “Nothing can prevent a man’s progress forward if he but attends to the purification of his vehicles [the physical, emotional and lower mind body]. The light will shine forth with ever-greater clarity, as the refining process goes on, until... great will be the glory of the inner man.” This inner light explodes out of Harry Potter’s lightning-scar at the beginning of *The Philosopher’s Stone* (Figure 62). Hence the sphere, symbolising the smallest scintilla of light within Harry Potter, the alchemical *lapis*, and even the indefinable circumference of the Absolute, displays the multiplicity of meanings that the *lapis philosophorum* evokes.



**Figure 62**

*Light emanating from the infant*

*Harry Potter’s scar* (Columbus 2001).

At the conclusion of this chapter, the predominant alchemical symbolism of the *lapis* in the *Harry Potter* films has now been described. It has also been explained that the *lapis* functions as a signifier for a form of Christian universalism: a hybrid mythic arena where Pagan and Christian myth can interact under the banner of Hogwarts to elucidate the multifaceted meaning of Harry’s destiny. Yet from the discussion put forth in this chapter, it also becomes apparent that a strictly historic or conservatively religious reading of the *lapis* in the *Harry Potter* films is not the only available interpretation. Harry’s destiny is linked to the Messianic symbolism embedded in the *lapis*, but this symbolism can also be approached from a more esoteric

understanding. As such, an interpretation that relies exclusively on Christian symbolism or a historic appraisal of world mythology is not sufficient to explain the full signification of the *lapis*. Chapter Seven concludes this study's analysis of the *lapis* by addressing its remaining symbolism and focusing on its more esoteric associations.



## CHAPTER 7

### *Esoteric Alchemy*

#### 7.1. Introduction

The tone of the visual symbols so far discussed would indicate that a strongly spiritual or esoteric reading of the *Harry Potter* films is more than a possibility. Such symbols may arise because the *Harry Potter* books and films have a particular spiritual ideology that extends beyond conservative Christianity; or given the archetypal nature of the signs discussed they may simply reveal a universal mysticism because they are the inescapable product of some collective psychological unconscious (Jung 1989:87), wherein the root and ambivalence of the “ultimate signified” may lie. Irrespective, as a hermeneutic undertaking this study is concerned with *what* is being signified rather than the psychological dynamics of why it is being signified. Clearly the tone of the discussion up until this point has highlighted a general mysticism that is equally compatible with ancient mythology as well as contemporary Cosmic Humanism, owing to its universal nature. In part this is a result of employing alchemical symbols. Additionally, the previous chapters have highlighted how the *Harry Potter* films have extended the universal signification of Rowling’s novels.

The introduction of a universal esoteric or Cosmic Humanist interpretation of the *Harry Potter* films places the discourse upon particularly shaky terrain. JK Rowling (Hattenstone 2000:[sp]) recalls that “New ageism leaves me completely cold”, and her treatment of Professor Trelawney, the divination teacher, indicates a certain scepticism of divination and esoteric “magic” practices. Needless to say, in spite of all her mystical superstitions, it is still Professor Trelawney who is responsible for two major prophecies in the *Harry Potter* novels, and it is also Professor Trelawney who foresees the calamity of the “lightning struck tower” by using the esoteric Tarot deck. While Trelawney is a discredited seer, her diluted bloodline does on occasion provide accurate prophetic insight. Rowling tends to highlight the difference between



prophecy and divination. She plays with the idea that prophecy is conditional, but certainly makes the case that it can be accurate. Similarly, Rowling evokes a great deal of astrological symbolism within her novels, highlighted by the nomenclature of the Black family, and in particular Sirius and Regulus Black. Astrology is an important facet of the hermetic art and it is subsequently given a significant presence within the *Harry Potter* novels. Primarily, Rowling's approach to astrology is more scientific than experiential, and her incorporation thereof displays the same lack of obedience to any particular theology that her employment of fantastical magic spells does. Astrology is fundamental to alchemy because, as Valentine Weigel explains in the introduction to *Astrology Theologized* (1886:[sp]):

Astrology is Philosophy [i.e. alchemy] itself, or it is the whole light of Nature, from whence ariseth the universal natural Wisdom, or a solid, sincere, and exquisite knowledge of natural things: which light of Nature is twofold, external and internal: external in the Macrocosm, internal in the Microcosm. Or, Astrology is the very knowledge of good and evil, which is, and bears rule in Things subject to Nature; which Science flourishing in man, unless it be ruled and governed by Theology, that is Divine Wisdom, as the handmaid by her mistress, is vicious.

The incorporation of astrology, however, has a particularly esoteric purpose as well. This purpose is clearly defined through the symbolism of the character Sirius Black. It was previously mentioned in Chapter Four that Sirius Black is an extensive signifier of mythological, alchemical and astrological symbolism. Up until now it has not been prudent to discuss the full extent of his astrological symbolism, as the focus has been upon Sirius Black as a simple signifier of the alchemical *nigredo*. Yet Sirius Black is not given his first name coincidentally. The star Sirius has a prominent role within Eastern and Western astrology that extends beyond a standard interpretation of alchemical symbols. Because the astrological significance of the relationship between Sirius Black and his godson, Harry Potter, is pertinent to an interpretation of the *Harry Potter* films, this study must return to look in depth at the signification that this character maintains. In unveiling the astrological connections between Harry Potter and Sirius Black, this study is able to uncover a further plateau of signification held within the *lapis philosophorum*.

Sirius Black's ultimate departure through the mystical veil in the Department of Mysteries at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix*, marks a highly ethereal experience. Sirius Black, who represents the *psychopomp*, the god of the veil between life and the hereafter, is literally dissolved into the substance of an insubstantial veil that marks the limen to the spirit realm (Figure 63). His physical dissolution into spirit comes during an epic wand battle between the Death Eaters and the Order of the Phoenix. Director David Yates' (2007) vision for *The Order of the Phoenix* marks a radical departure from previous depictions of magic in the *Harry Potter* films. The spectacular wand battles of the adult wizards are markedly faster and more impressive than the elementary magic that the Hogwarts students have engaged with up until

this point. In fact, the film of *The Order of the Phoenix* depicts the battle between the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters less as a showdown of pointed wands, and more as an intense spiritual battle between the forces of “light” and “dark”. The members of the Order literally arrive enrobed in a brilliant white cloud of light that dissipates as they emerge from the ethereal realm and manifest before the viewer’s eyes (Figure 64). Their battles with the Death Eaters are subsequently depicted as a chaotic struggle of black and white smoke (Figure 65). The wizards float through the air like spiritual entities, oblivious to the physical reality of gravity. If anything, these visuals establish the idea that the “magic” in *Harry Potter* supersedes the common, physical realm.



**Figure 63**

*Sirius Black is swallowed by the veil (Yates 2007).*



**Figure 64**

*The Order of the Phoenix arrive (Yates 2007).*



**Figure 65**

*Light and dark in an ethereal battle (Yates 2007).*

There is evidence to suggest that Rowling's descriptions similarly speak of a spiritual, experiential phenomenon, and that the *Harry Potter* novels are not merely a literary pastiche of mythic ideas. In *The Goblet of Fire*, Harry Potter is not yet able to translocate himself in the fashion that the adult wizards do. He does, however, come into contact with a magical device known as a portkey, which, when touched, instantaneously transports the holder to a prescribed location. Upon touching the portkey, "Harry felt as though a hook just behind his navel had been suddenly jerked irresistibly forwards... it was pulling him magnetically onwards" (Rowling 2000:69). The navel is the place where the umbilical chord was attached, and astral travellers sometimes speak of an astral or silver "chord" that connects their astral body to their physical body (Farrar & Farrar 1984:214, sec. II). Incidentally, this astral chord may sometimes emanate from the stomach or solar plexus area, while the initial sensation of astral projection is described as a "magnetic pull" on the weightless astral body.

Similarly, during Harry Potter's near-death experience at the end of *The Deathly Hallows*, he visits an astral junction which he visualises as King's Cross station. A while after arriving, he cordially asks Dumbledore "Where are we, exactly?" (Rowling 2007:570). Dumbledore cannot see the arena for what it is and replies, "My dear boy, I have no idea. This is, as they say, *your* party." Rowling's choice of an ethereal King's Cross station is an interesting one. Throughout the *Harry Potter* series, King's Cross station has functioned as a transitional arena, a liminal vicinity that Harry Potter transgresses when passing between the "normal" world and the magic of Hogwarts Castle. Similarly, the ethereal King's Cross station is a limen between Harry's physical reality (earth), and the next stage of his soul's journey, commonly interpreted as a type of Heaven, but never explicitly clarified by Rowling. It is apparent that Harry Potter has a choice at this juncture. He may choose to return to the physical world or alternatively to "board

a train” and continue “On” as Dumbledore so eloquently explains (Rowling 2007:578). It is telling that Harry Potter is able to visualise this transitional arena in whichever fashion he chooses. According to Patrick Dunn (2005:15):

You can use imagination to create things in the so-called “astral plane” (plane of formation). In this (non) place, ideas take on substance and substance exists only as a reflection of ideas... The plane of formation contains things the physical world does not; symbols take on a dynamic solidity.

Before leaving King’s Cross station, Harry Potter asks Dumbledore, “Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?” Dumbledore replies, “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?” (Rowling 2007:579).

## 7.2. Sirius Black and Astrology

The idea of “astral projection” is important, for it is on the astral or cosmic plane that the full esoteric significance of Sirius Black is revealed. According to Alice Bailey (1951b:17), the star Sirius houses a great Lodge on the astral plane. In *Initiation, Human and Solar*, Bailey explains that there are *seven* occult initiations. The term “initiation” may be difficult to understand if the reader has not had access to esoteric writings; it is a complex spiritual process that cannot be divulged within the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that the initiations function by making the “student” more aware of his higher self, his spirit, and the Logos.<sup>35</sup> Of the seven initiations, it is the *fifth* initiation that makes the student an “entered apprentice” of the *Lodge on Sirius*. Its symbolism is similar to that of the “entered apprentice” in Masonic ritual. Those students who “pass away from the earth after the fifth initiation” take their subsequent initiations within the cosmic system. In other words, they move away from our planetary initiatory system and progress to the astral. The fifth initiation makes the student an “entered apprentice” of the *Lodge on Sirius*. To attain this level, the student has progressed beyond the initiations of the threshold, beyond the initiations of the planetary domain, and enters into the first of the cosmic, or Sirian, initiations. The fifth initiation thus brings the student in direct contact with Sirius. It is the destiny of those initiates who have become “spiritually evolved” (in a crude manner of explanation). A similar idea is found in Egyptian antiquity, where the star Sirius was regarded as a place of spiritual attainment. It symbolises the transcendence of the planetary, and the destination of the soul.

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<sup>35</sup> As Bailey (1951b:18-19) explains, “Each successive initiation brings about a more complete unification of the personality and the Ego, and on higher levels still, with the Monad... The whole process is therefore for the purpose of making man consciously one... With himself... With his higher Self... With his Spirit... [and with] the Logos”.

It is no accident that Sirius Black falls through the veil in book *five* of the series: *The Order of the Phoenix*. The fifth book equates to the fifth level of initiation and there is an evolution from the planetary to the cosmic. The veil is symbolic of this progression. It is the hymen between this world and the next, between the planet and the cosmos, and between the physical reality and the spiritual reality. Traditionally, a veil conveys the meaning of the separation of one thing from another. To pass through the veil is to gain access to hidden or revealed knowledge (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1062). Sirius Black passes through the veil after the prophecy pertaining to Harry Potter and Voldemort is released. Year five is incidentally also the time when the Hogwarts students write their OWL (Ordinary Wizarding Level) exams, opening the path to more difficult study, but higher revelation. Both the novel and the film of *The Order of the Phoenix* describe the veil as part of an archway. The presence of the archway emphasises the idea that the veil is a door to another dimension. Sirius Black, the *psychopomp*, has fallen through the point of mediation between this world and the “other” world.

The star Sirius is of critical importance at the fifth level of initiation. Its influence, however, is first felt after the *third* initiation, when “the true nature of the spirit aspect begins to dawn upon the liberated, intuitive perception of the initiate” (Bailey 1951a:300). In correspondence with this it may be noted that Harry Potter first becomes aware of Sirius Black during the third novel of the series: *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. It is only at the end of Harry Potter’s third year that the truth of Sirius Black is revealed to him, and Harry embraces Sirius as his godfather. It is clear that this relationship is not coincidental. Sirius transmits a literal as well as a symbolic influence on Harry Potter and this connection should not be undervalued. The astrology that Sirius highlights is crucial to a deeper interpretation of Harry Potter and the esoteric attainment of the *lapis*: the golden awareness. Astrological symbolism reveals that Harry Potter does not have an arbitrary birth date.

### 7.2.1. *The Leo-lapis*

In astrological terms the star *Sirius* is considered to be the ruler of the constellation *Leo* (Bailey 1951a:299). The astrological dates of Leo within the tropical zodiac are usually from around the end of July to the end of August. Harry Potter, who is “born as the seventh month dies” (Rowling 2003:741), in other words on the July 31<sup>st</sup>, falls precisely within the astrological influence of Leo. The “seventh month” is strategic for seven is a number of unity (Agrippa 1651b:[sp]), of completion, and of *spiritual perfection*. When the “seventh month dies” the eighth begins, and eight speaks of new beginnings, of a rebirth from behind the hymen or veil. In the *Corpus Hermeticum 1.26*, Hermes Trismegistus informs his pupil that the *ogdoad*, or *eighth* sphere of the heavens, is filled with the presence of the father (God) (Copenhaver 1996:6). It can only be reached, however, by passing through the first seven spheres, the seventh being attributed to the planet Saturn and long associated with melancholia, death and self-



sacrifice. Therefore, on the spiritual plane, seven is a type of completion that ends in a cyclical death, while eight speaks of the divine glory of rebirth, of the new cycle that begins at the moment that the old passes away. Incidentally, on the reversed astrological wheel, Leo is the eighth sign of the zodiac. Therefore, as Bailey (1951a:286) attests, Leo marks the beginning of a new cycle at the moment that self-consciousness is born.

Like the eternal sphere of the golden Snitch, and the serpent-dragon that symbolises both life and death, the astrological sign of Leo speaks of beginnings and endings within the cosmic cycle of death and rebirth. Most importantly, Leo alludes to the life, rebirth and reincarnation of the divine hero as a recurring world redeemer, the Son of God, who is the destroyer of death and darkness. It is the cosmic representation of the alchemical principle of the *lapis*. Leo is the great lion of Gryffindor House and it symbolises kingship and authority. There is no planet that falls in Leo, nor is there a planet exalted in this sign (Bailey 1951a:310) therefore, the student under Leo knows that he is ultimately the ruler of himself and the ruler of his own life. He is his own king, his own authority. He must *choose* to become a hero and saviour to the external world as well, as Harry Potter does. “I was ready to die to stop you hurting these people,” Harry Potter tells Voldemort (Rowling 2007:591). It is the final, mature manifestation of the Leo person to function as the “inspired spiritual sacrifice” (Bailey 1951a:307). The Leo person therefore reenacts the death and passion of the *opus alchymicum*. He becomes sensitive to the world condition, the “greater good” and is freed of personal desires. As such he expresses the will of the whole, the divine consciousness (Bailey 1951a :296). In esoteric terms, this attainment of the divine consciousness is the attainment of the spiritual *lapis*. According to Bailey (1951a:223), the Leo person learns his esoteric destiny from the vertical axis of the astrological “Fixed Cross”: “the self-centered individual in Leo learns the lesson of the Cross and becomes decentralised, group conscious, and given to service”. Upon his sacrifice, Harry Potter arrives at King’s Cross station and has a discussion with his spiritual mentor, Albus Dumbledore, before returning to the physical plane. It is Dumbledore who tells him that “By returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart. If this seems to you a worthy goal, then we say goodbye for the present” (Rowling 2007:578).

Continuing with the relevant symbolism of Leo, it should also be noted that Leo is a *fire* sign. Fire is symbolic of purification and perfection. According to Alice Bailey (1951a:287) the adept in Leo is a “Son of Fire”, not unlike the alchemist, who is the spiritual and physical “master of fire” (Eliade 1978:86). She states that, “there is in them that peculiar quality which can burn and destroy and so eradicate all that hinders their essentially divine expression”. It is Leo that directs the esoteric *solar fire*, focusing the energies of the star Sirius itself. These energies are related to the “ray” or “aspect” of *love-wisdom* (Bailey 1951a:293,416). Love, in Rowling’s world, is that peculiar ancient magic that has protected Harry Potter and strengthens him in his battle against Voldemort. Most interestingly, Alice Bailey (1951a:300) claims that the influence of Sirius is, in fact, focussed in the star *Regulus*. Regulus is a star of the first magnitude. It is often called “the heart of the lion” and it is found within the constellation of Leo.

Rowling ensures that all three of these astrological symbols are signified in her novels. The star Sirius, as a symbol of resurrection and the destiny of the human soul, is embodied by Sirius Black. The energy of this “resurrection star” is directed to Leo (who is Harry Potter), via the brightest star of its constellation: Regulus. The name Regulus is derived from Latin. It is the diminutive form of the word for “king”. Rowling has ensured that Sirius Black’s brother is named Regulus, and it is he who discovered one of Voldemort’s Horcruxes, indirectly linking him to Harry Potter’s quest. Regulus is the symbolic expression of Kingship while his brother Sirius manifests the kind of love that leads to self-sacrifice. This is the kind of love that Harry’s mother Lilly showed when she sacrificed herself for the sake of her son. It is the kind of self-sacrifice that Sirius Black speaks of when he confronts Wormtail at the end of *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. Sirius tells Wormtail that he would rather have died than betray his friends, as Wormtail himself had done (Rowling 1999:275). Sirius, incidentally, is described in some Egyptian texts as the *celestial lily* (Budge 1973a:111). The lily is a flower of love and it is a symbol of intimacy (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:608).<sup>36</sup>

### 7.3. The Serpent and the Candle

Clearly the unveiling of Sirius Black’s astrological symbolism complements the alchemical ideology of the *Harry Potter* films, allowing for a deeper understanding of some of the esoteric events. This is particularly true of Alfonso Cuarón’s (2004) filmic interpretation of *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. Here Harry Potter is continually plagued by the Dementors, creatures that feed off of positive emotions and imbue their direct environment with an air of negativity. This is not unlike the function of those astral entities known as the *dark brothers*, who sever the emotional body from the physical body (Bailey 1951b:125) in much the same way that the Dementor strips the soul of the person from his body through the application of its “kiss”. While the visual representation of the Dementors may not be particularly revealing, the symbolism surrounding Harry’s attempt to overcome them is. To overcome the Dementors is a right of passage that he must undertake. It is a passage that brings him toward an inexorable encounter with Sirius, that allows him to discover himself, and to cement his status as the heroic protagonist. According to Rowling (1999:176), the only way to overcome a Dementor is through the use of the Patronus charm, a spell that functions by creating a guardian of positive energy for the Dementor to feed off of. The shape of each Patronus is unique to the caster.

Rowling describes little of the History of Magic classroom in which Harry is taught the Patronus charm. In the film of *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, however, the lessons appear to have moved to the astronomy tower. The entire room is subsequently filled with astronomical

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<sup>36</sup> See also the Hebrew tradition and in particular the text *Shir-HaShirim* (Song of Solomon). The elected bride is compared to a lily (Harry’s mother’s name), while the bridegroom is a young stag (Harry’s father’s animagus form)

gadgets relating to planets, orbits and solar systems (Figure 66). The setting hints towards a visualisation of the astral plane and the astrological symbolism that Sirius Black crystallises. Of all the objects in the room, the most telling are five candles, modelled after a section of the human spine, all with an incandescent wick at the apex of the spine (Figure 67).



**Figure 66**

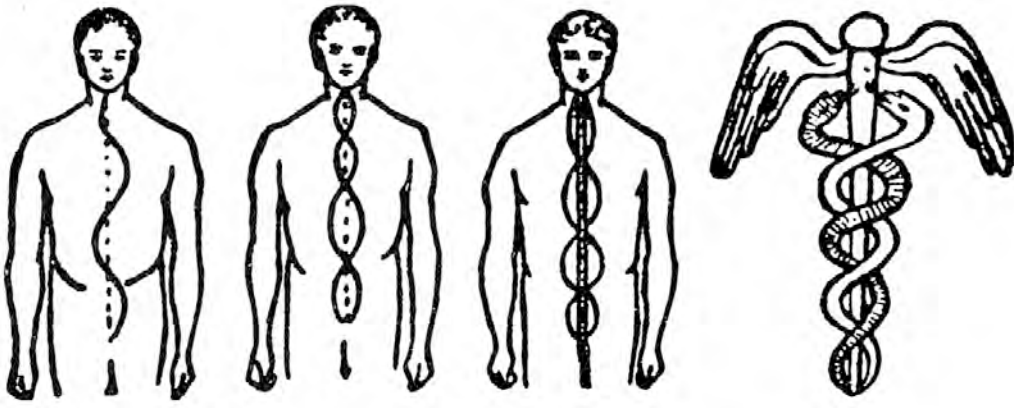
*The astronomy tower (Cuaron 2004).*



**Figure 67**

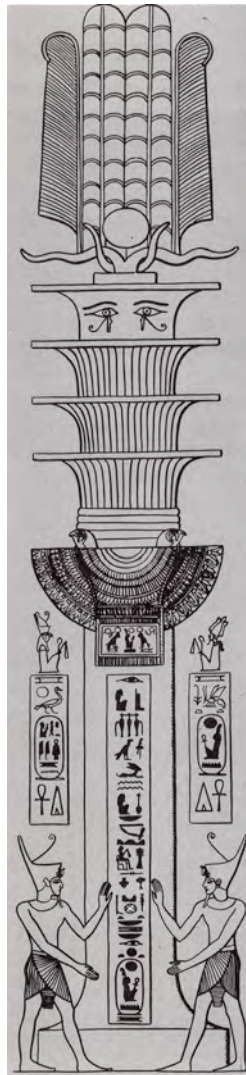
*The Kundalini candles (Cuaron 2004).*

While these candles feel like arbitrary additions, born of the dark and gothic recesses of a creative mind adding its own subtext to Rowling’s narrative, they couldn’t be more appropriate. These spine-candles may not represent the original vision of alchemy that Rowling imagined, but their placement is supported by the symbolic evidence laid down in her novels. Like other symbols from the *Harry Potter* novels, these candles point to the “universal signified”, but on a level that is more esoteric. In so doing, these symbols expose the depth of Rowling’s spiritual creation.



**Figure 68**

The serpent fire emerges from the spine of man (Roob 2005:408).



**Figure 69**

The *djed* pillar of Osiris (Campbell 1974:22).

In esoteric terms, the *spine* can be thought of as a passage, the conduit for energy to exit the body. It is the means of escape for consciousness out of the body and away from the physical reality. The Kundalini, or *serpent fire*, is an energy that lies dormant at the base of the spine. In alchemy it is referred to as the Secret Fire (Stavish 1998b:[sp]). It travels up the spine in a diagonal flash that represents a lightning bolt, not unlike Harry Potter's scar, whereafter it is released through the crown of the head. In India the spine is referred to as the "staff of Brahma" and it is believed to be the archetype of the caduceus (Figure 68) – traditionally received as the staff of Hermes with two intertwined serpents (Roob 2005:408). It is during the process of the Kundalini rising that the pupil may experience astral projection. The rising of the Kundalini fire awakens a higher state of consciousness, where the pupil can attain the spiritual *lapis*. The wings of the caduceus "signify the power of conscious flight through the higher worlds [cosmos] brought about by the unfolding of [the Kundalini] fire," (Roob 2005:408) while the two serpents, male and female speak of harmony and equilibrium. The occult energy of the sun, directed in Leo together with the influence of Sirius, is responsible for the awakening of the Kundalini fire (Bailey 1951a:301). It is this process that permits a greater degree self-consciousness and an eventual alignment with the divine plan.

On a purely mythological level the candles represent the spine of Osiris, also known as the *djed* pillar. The connection here cannot go unnoticed, for Osiris is the "Father" of the primary Egyptian trinity of Osiris, Isis and the Child Horus. Harry Potter is practicing the *Patronus* charm, derived from the Latin *pater*, meaning father. The spine of Osiris not only speaks of the spirit of fatherhood, it is also a symbol of the seat of power of Osiris in his capacity as the Lord of the heavens and the earth.<sup>37</sup> More importantly, the eyes of Osiris look out from the top of the *djed* pillar, speaking of eternal life. They promise an immortality that cannot be quenched by physical death, for Osiris is the god of resurrection (Campbell 1974:22). At the top of the *djed* pillar there is sometimes a depiction of the *sun of illumination*, and this may be compared to the incandescent wicks at the top of the candles (see Figure 69). The true illumination of the spiritual sun can only be experienced through the power of the release of the Kundalini energy within the pupil. He must, progressively, become one with the cosmos around him so that he may choose the path of the brotherhood on Sirius. The spine-candles are thus a strong visual hybridisation of ideas. They refer to the human spine as a path of occult power, to the backbone of Osiris as the pillar of the world, and to the manifestation of the central, spiritual Sun: the *lapis* in the macrocosm. They are emblematic of the future connection between Harry Potter and Sirius Black, and of his face-to-face encounter with the bright and volatile sun Sirius.

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<sup>37</sup> The *djed* of Osiris may originally have been a representation of a sacrum which was confused with a portion of the backbone (Budge 1973a:48). As such, the *djed* speaks not only of the rigid strength of the erect spine, but also of the lowest part of the back that would connect to the throne as a seat of authority. Osiris has always been depicted as a king, whether in writing or through his visual iconography. He, like his son Horus, is "Lord of all the earth".



The newly practised Patronus charm becomes crucial to Harry Potter's survival at the end of *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. Here he is pitted against a swarm of Dementors as he attempts to protect himself and his godfather, Sirius Black. He produces a Patronus charm that takes the shape of a large, white stag, which is the animal form that his father (*pater*) adopted as an animagus (Figure 15). The stag is the alchemical *cervus fugitivus*, or fleeing heart. It is a symbol of *Mercurius* as the messenger and alchemical soul (Abraham 1998:32, Delphinus [sa]:[sp]). The stag is also regarded as a symbol of the Tree of Life, and hence of the rhythms of fecundity, growth and rebirth within nature. Because the stag sheds its antlers it is a perfect symbol of resurrective prowess and it supplements the mythological symbolism of Sirius, as the black dog, quite nicely. The stag, like the dog, has often been considered a *psychopomp*, transporting the soul of the deceased to the underworld (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:920-3). The alchemical soul mediates between the spirit and the body of the metals (Abraham 1998:32). Thus the presence of the white stag reveals that the limen between the physical world and the spiritual/astral world has been crossed. It is this brilliant "mediator of light", conjured through the positive energy of Harry Potter and indicative of his spiritual capabilities, that drives away the dreaded Dementors.



**Figure 70**  
*Sirius Black's soul as a scintilla of light*  
(Cuaron 2004).

The stag, as the alchemical soul of the metal, is intricately linked to the star Sirius, who represents the destination of souls on the cosmic plane. The esoteric astrological symbolism in the *Harry Potter* films reiterates the importance of the cosmic soul, first highlighted by the golden Snitch. Esoteric alchemy is concerned with purifying the soul of the alchemist to resplendent gold. Subsequently *Esoteric Astrology*, as it is described by Alice Bailey and in this study, is the astrology of the *soul* and not of the personality. "Throughout the universe, it is the soul which is the conscious, sensitive theme of the divine plan" (Bailey, "Esoteric Astrology"

295). The events that unfold at the end of *The Prisoner of Azkaban* represent a battle for the soul of Sirius Black, which emerges from his mouth as a scintilla of light (Figure 70).



**Figure 71**

*The lake in the forbidden forest*

(Cuaron 2004).

The pervasive presence of Sirius Black continually forces the esoteric context to the fore, and the events of *The Prisoner of Azkaban* should be interpreted with this in mind. To recap, the esoteric symbolism explored thus far is as follows: the Dementors are astral beings engaged in a battle for the souls and emotions of those engaged in the spiritual path. Sirius is the destination of souls on the astral plane, and the white stag is the mediating soul between the physical and the spiritual. It becomes clear that the events that take place at the end of *The Prisoner of Azkaban* are specific and that the symbolism is meticulous. It is no accident that these events take place near a small lake in the Forbidden Forest (Figure 71). The forest symbolises the alchemical body, the Great Work that will become the philosopher's stone. The lake is the *prima materia*, associated with purification, baptism and rebirth. It is a matrix of destiny, a threshold between the old and the new, between the earthly man and the reborn spirit-man. Thus in some sense the lake, like the curtain in the Department of Mysteries, is a veil of transcendence.

The symbolism revealed above has explained a great deal about the kind of hero that Rowling has created. Outside of the narrative and characterisation, the symbolism itself indicates how she may read the “hero myth”, and the astrological symbolism of Sirius Black is crucial to this ideology. In the *Prisoner of Azkaban* Harry Potter exercises his phenomenal potential and decides to align with Sirius. Symbolically this means that he is associated with the “Great Lodge” on Sirius, and that he begins to express the work of the occult Hierarchy. The work of the initiate who takes this path, and thus of Harry Potter, is the execution of the divine plan.

According to Saint Germain (Prophet & Prophet 1993:115, emphasis added) the Brotherhood of adepts on Sirius seeks to elevate and enlighten the children of God: “Working from *beyond the veil* (or secretly, right in the very midst of the people), they have sponsored the great movements for religious liberty, scientific advancement, and political freedom”.

During the course of the novels, Harry Potter, being a Leo, comes to recognise that he is a “self-sufficient unit [becoming] increasingly aware of its oneness, its aloneness and its isolated attitude as “one in the centre of its... cosmos” (Bailey 1951a:292). This is painfully apparent in *The Order of the Phoenix*. This sense of isolation, which so easily leads to self-centeredness and the execution of personal agendas, is, however, altered within Harry Potter through his circumstances and his further initiations. Self-consciousness makes room for a conscious awareness of the divine plan. That energy which could have been directed towards selfish goals is instead focused into world redemption. Because he is a Leo, Harry Potter has the personality traits of the Nietzschean hero. He chooses to be his own free agent, unguided by society (Campbell 1993:391). Harry *chooses* to be a hero, and it is in the act of choosing to be a hero that immortality (spiritual or physical) is granted, just like in the myth of Hercules. Harry Potter has made the heroic choice, and the ultimate expression of his freewill is the redemption of society itself. Rather than being guided by society he becomes the guide of society itself. In a symbolic sense he becomes a civilising hero, like Hermes Trismegistus or Prometheus. He brings structure, integrity and salvation from the darkness. He functions as an archetypal Messiah and he progresses the work of the Brotherhood of Sirius. In all things he is the perfect embodiment of the alchemical *lapis*.

#### **7.4. Conclusion**

Clearly Harry Potter is no ordinary hero. His symbolism is built upon ancient mythic archetypes, extending through astrology and alchemy and finally fixed through the symbolism of contemporary spirituality. The *lapis* is the key signifier of these connections. It highlights the importance of mythic thinking, and expresses the idea of a divine spark within humanity that can “become a candle to illuminate our whole self... It is a seed which can put forth golden shoots and blossom into a golden flower. It is a symbol of the wholeness and fulfilment to be attained when our body, soul and spirit sing together in unison, when the stars within dance with those without” (Marshall 2002:466). Harry Potter is the alchemical hero who embraces these principles, principles that are just as easily extended to the reader. Harry Potter is the symbol of the internalisation of the *lapis philosophorum*, and he is the embodiment of Rowling’s ethical and spiritual appraisal of the world. By understanding the astrological significance of Sirius, and combining this with aspects of mythology and alchemical *lapis*, the reader is permitted a deeper understanding not only of Rowling’s rich universe, but also of the heroic process within himself. The *lapis* speaks to the text of *Harry Potter*, and through this medium, initiates the

reader into the occult symbolism of death and rebirth, destiny and salvation. As Joseph Campbell (1993:391) concludes:

The modern hero, the modern *individual* who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding. “Live,” Nietzsche says, “as though the day were here.” It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe’s great victories, but in the silence of his personal despair.



## CHAPTER 8

### *The Alchemy of Authorship*

#### 8.1. Introduction

Chapters Four through Seven have revealed the complex nature of the symbolic *lapis*. Its signification remains a multiplicity; it is a dynamically shifting signifier that floats “midway between perfected and unperfected bodies”; it is the model and the catalyst of a process wherein all dichotomies can be brought together (Campbell 1974:256). Most importantly, it expresses these ideas at varying intensities of signification, from the most mundane, through to the perfectly transcendental. The *lapis* is terrestrial gold, it is the perfection of man, it is the path to the divine, and in some cases it is even a mirror of the Absolute itself. At all points within the *Harry Potter* films, the *lapis* can signify a number of things, and its principles are signified by a host of other symbols in an endless sea of visual hybridisation. Yet through all of this its meaning is never in conflict.

Because of its pervasive nature, the *lapis* is the perfect metaphor through which to ask questions pertaining to the transcendental, to cultural mores, and creative inspiration. The *lapis* is a crystallisation of the very creative process, whether this be within the individual, society or divinity. It is not important to consider whether or not the *lapis* ever signifies a pure, obtainable “end” to the creative act. What is important is that the *lapis* represents a creative desire that can be nurtured, at all levels, from the individual through to society and the transcendent. This creative process is essentially circular because the symbolism of the *lapis* is circular. As one author lays down the pen, another is willing to pick it up and continue the evolution of cultural signification. In essence the creative and hermeneutic processes merge in a continual dialectic of interpretation and re-presentation.



As a result of this the author can be envisaged as the manipulator of meaning. She is the alchemist of her text, moulding and re-imagining new stories from antique sources. The migration of signification between the *Harry Potter* novels and films expresses this evolution of signification. The vision of the *Harry Potter* films is built upon the alchemical foundations of Rowling's novels, but it expresses a stronger emphasis on the universalism of its alchemical signifiers. As an interpretation of the *Harry Potter* novels, the films illustrate a supplementary level of signification implying that their significance has evolved. Such a phenomenon is not a critical problem. The evolution of meaning within the *Harry Potter* films essentially indicates that their interpretation of Rowling's novels has highlighted an alchemical *metatext* that was previously less explicit. Hermeneutics assumes that "a text means what its author intends but also necessarily means more, acquiring new meanings as readers apply it to new situations" (Knapp & Michaels 1987:50). Indeed the creative act, the process of authorship, is also founded upon such a perpetual re-interpretation of cultural mores. Hence the faculty of hermeneutics is able to express itself fully as an interpretation of the dynamic between creation and reception. In true alchemical fashion, the supposed dichotomy of the author-reader is hybridised into a singular discourse.

The link between hermeneutics and alchemical philosophy has already been hinted at in Chapter Four. The former assumes the potential circularity of the signifying framework, while the latter revels in disguising its meaning through a circular system of inter-related signs. Alchemy purposefully produces symbols that are complex, symbols that require a strongly hermeneutic mind able to decode the context of its discourse. But the complexity of alchemical language serves a second purpose, as a mechanism for transmitting occult truth and a perception of the universe that is founded upon layers of correspondence. Without its rich interconnection of archetypal symbols, alchemy is unable to fully represent its cognition of the universe. This cognition sees a unity of parts. Signs become organisms, striving for perfection while influencing one another in a contiguous loop. It is no accident that the historic Hermes is associated with both hermeneutics and alchemy. He is the manifestation of the interpretative art as well as of the re-creative process, pulling symbolic shades out of Hades and into a new life of meaning. As a *psychopomp*, his historic function makes of him the *author* of re-contextualisation. Working with what already exists, the author-hermeneutician provides a new manifestation of the archetypal text.

While to some the link between alchemy and authorship may seem tenuous, this chapter highlights potential similarities between these two conceptual frameworks. To discuss alchemy is to discuss authorship, for in an abstract, mythic way their focuses are entwined. Both theoretical frameworks have asked the same fundamental questions relating to creativity and the relationship between man, God, and Creation. Both alchemy and authorship have touched on aspects of the transcendent and the immanent, and these are questions that are mirrored in the

heroic quest and the destiny of Harry Potter. Perhaps better than most popular works of fiction released in the last decade, Rowling's novels allow for a unique reconception of alchemy and its relationship to the authorial process. It is evident that Rowling has written much of herself into her novels, and the pertinent question is what the significance of alchemy is to her as author, as well as to the internalisation of the novels by readers.

This study has illustrated that alchemy can be thought of as a practical religious rehearsal; refined over centuries, mutated by cultures, but ultimately born in the crucible of universal mythology and cosmology. Cosmology addresses possible beginnings and endings. It is an expression of the human understanding, the desire to integrate with and yet differentiate ourselves from the world around us. Alchemy is, as Mercia Eliade (1978:34) has pointed out, built upon an anthropocentric view of the cosmos. In a sense the universe is like humanity because we are like the universe. Alchemy is thus a mixture of subjective human desires and objective observations. This study has revealed that alchemy is ultimately a "religion" of life and death, tied to cycles of regeneration found within Nature. The changeability and perfection of man is mirrored in a belief in the transmutability of metals.

"Transmutability" is an appropriate metaphor, for both alchemy and authorship have proven to be the most malleable of intellectual concepts. It is difficult to speak of a single "Alchemy" as if it were some absolute directive to an unfaltering understanding of the surrounding cosmos. Rather, postmodern discourse considers the language of "alchemies", signifying a pluralism of interpretation, refined and adopted by different cultures with different needs, but adhering to the same core principles (Linden 2003:4). Similarly it is difficult to speak of a single "Author" as an absolute literary reality devoid of division or alterable interpretation. Authorship continues to be an avenue of intense speculation because it affects both writer and reader, their relationship to one another, to the created work, and to the cosmos and the transcendent. It is no small statement when Seán Burke (1995:xv-xvi) claims that "Authorship, like cosmology, remains a source of fascination for believers and non-believers alike since the issues which it raises reflect any given society's sense of being in the world, and construction of itself in relation to discourse, knowledge and tradition" These are the same eternal questions echoed through the mysticism of alchemy. As Burke (1995:xvi) informs the reader, authorship addresses the ideas of creativity and origin, of agency and free will, of cultural identity, of ownership and authority, to name but a few. The momentary death and disappearance of the author, partly at the hands of Roland Barthes (1977:142), has only served to highlight how strongly contemporary ideas of creativity and the creative process are linked to cosmology and an identification with the idea of the "dying god". It is no accident that Harry Potter mirrors this process. He is the "boy who lived" (Rowling 1997:18), the one who has come back from the precipice of death. His story is a poignant summation of Rowling's view of life and death and her understanding of the same cosmological principles. The Harry Potter novels are a "reawakening" of these mythic and alchemical arguments to the modern consciousness.

The mythic symbolism that Rowling accesses allows the discourse to consider a number of key concepts regarding authorship through a metaphor removed from stringent academic language. It is possible to ask philosophical questions about authorship, through its relation to such mythic symbols. These symbols are pervasive and they are strong indicators of cultural conventions. It is, for example, possible to consider how the mythic phoenix relates to the author, and why it is such an important symbol to Rowling. A consideration of the incorporation of mythic symbolism in the *Harry Potter* novels and films may help the reader to understand his or her process of interaction with the narrative. Ultimately an analysis of this symbolism reveals the reason for the sharp dividing line between those who speak for and those who speak against the novels. Ultimately it is possible to reflect on what alchemical and hermeneutic philosophy teaches about the relationship of Rowling and the reader to the text of *Harry Potter*.

## 8.2. Alchemy and Cosmology

Rowling employs strong alchemical symbolism in the *Harry Potter* novels. It can be assumed that she chooses alchemy as her symbolic foundation because it mirrors some of her views on life, destiny, creation, and the cosmos. Chapter Two has revealed that Rowling is not interested in an alchemy that attempts to manufacture gold or prolong physical life indefinitely. If this were the case then she would not have had Albus Dumbledore say to Harry Potter, “You know, the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all – the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things which are worst for them” (Rowling 1997:215). Rather, alchemy fits with her general ideal that death can be conquered, not through its physical delay, but because death becomes powerless to influence the individual. She writes in *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:268-269) that, “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death... It doesn’t mean defeating death... It means... living beyond death. Living after death”. This is in part a transcendental perspective inspired by an alchemical worldview. Alchemy teaches that there can be no immortality without death. “Death is but the next great adventure” (Rowling 1997:215). The alchemist must die to himself if he wants to achieve true immortality – an immortality of spirit that transcends the mundane flesh so susceptible to decay.

In spite of the alchemical fascination with symbolic death, it is not a discipline bound to human mortality. It attempts to transcend the impure human condition. Alchemy is rooted in a mystical sympathy with the cosmos and this allows for “an appraisal of the world around us in terms of life, and in terms of anthropocentric destiny, embracing sexuality, fecundity, death and rebirth” (Eliade 1978:34). In other words, alchemy brings humanity in touch with the vegetative cycles of death, burial and growth. Death is not something to be avoided. Rather, it is a natural necessity. If a seed does not enter the ground to die, then it cannot produce a new harvest. The alchemist understands and accepts the cosmic cycles of death and rebirth visible all around him. He takes his inspiration from Nature because he sees in the world around him a mirror of his

own life. Alchemy is his quest to discover the sacred powers of regeneration visible all around him. The symbols that he chooses, like the phoenix and the ouroboros are a concise representation of a never-ending cosmic cycle of death and rebirth. It is not only the seed that dies and is resurrected. The monthly waxing and waning of the moon shows that the powers of regeneration extend to the heavens as well. The sun undergoes an annual battle in which its power diminishes as it approaches the winter solstice. Upon its death the sun is reborn and commences its ascendancy to full power in the middle of summer. This symbolism is still re-enacted today in Yule or Christmas traditions.

All of these celestial and terrestrial events can be imagined as a manifestation of the divine principle. They are a demonstration of the dying god in his multitude of forms, at least from the eyes of the enlightened alchemist. Thus the cosmos re-enacts the divine rules. Death is a limen. It is the last thing that keeps the body attached to the earth; it is the final barrier, the last initiation that must be undertaken so that at its conclusion the human can be reconciled with God and with the transcendent. R. Scott Bakker (2006:41) writes in the *The Thousandfold Thought* that “Death, in the strict sense, cannot be defined, for whatever predicate we, the living, attribute to it necessarily belongs to Life. This means that Death, as a category, behaves in a manner indistinguishable from the infinite, and from God”. From this perspective God is like death, because he is separated from everything that the chain of signification has a reference for. As the “ultimate signified”, the Absolute God stands alone in the ether of the indescribable, as unfathomable as the experience of death. Bakker may be writing as an author of fiction and not a recognised academic, but his philosophical argument highlights the fundamental dichotomy of the cosmos: the segregation of life and death, of God and the created. It is the same duality that Friedrich Nietzsche (1995:326, emphasis added) recognises:

The concept of ‘God’ invented as a counterconcept of life – everything harmful, poisonous, slanderous, *the whole hostility unto death against life synthesized in this concept in a gruesome unity!* The concept of the ‘beyond,’ the ‘true world’ invented in order to devaluate the only world there is – in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality!

It is for such reasons that Nietzsche calls for the death of God, because God and concomitant ideals of the transcendental are the binary opposite of everything that he values: life, the natural world, and, of course, the Self. His attack could as easily be directed to alchemy as it is to Christianity. Yet in his attempt to abolish the deity, Nietzsche has overlooked the mystical notion that God is already perpetually dead. It is not Nietzsche who killed him, but mythology that kills him over and over again. Nietzsche only made the act a palpable academic reality and an attempt at finality, not by killing God, but by removing him entirely from the vocabulary of philosophy. Within this perspective, death and life are still imagined as binary opposites rather than as points on an eternal continuum. It is the function of alchemy to reconcile the “carnage of essences” (Artaud 1958:31), the divisions of the universe, starting with the dichotomy of male-

female, and ending with the reconciliation of life into death and death into new life. Thus the alchemist calls for the death of the god for an entirely different reason.

The death of God is not his removal from the world. Instead, the dying god, eventually the god of death, becomes also the god of the resurrection. He is, according to Derrida (2004:97), “less interested in life or death than in death as a repetition of life and life as a rehearsal of death”. The only true alchemical God is a god of death, in all of its aspects, because he is interested in the transgression of it, the movement away from it. To die is to be reborn. To die permits the adept access to a process that will make him like God. The alchemist has therefore understood death as a remoulding and a progression of life. According to Weil (1947:37), death is “An instantaneous state, without past or future. Indispensable for entering eternity”. While logocentric logic dictates that life and death cannot be the same (for they are binary opposites), the alchemist attempts to reconcile these divisions. His chief goal, the *lapis philosophorum*, is nothing other than the unity of this division. It is the androgyny of male female, and the reconciliation of God and creation, life and death.

For the alchemist the achievement of androgyny is the reconstitution of the divided self, the establishment of a higher consciousness that leads to perfection (Schwarz 1980:58-59). This then, is the alchemical end-game. If the alchemist can achieve a symbolic marriage of his metals and overcome the division in nature, then ultimately he can reunify his divided self. The alchemist, reconciled with his true nature, is in turn reconciled with God. Indeed he becomes like god, once again made in His image. This idea is expressed in the popular couplet of Lorenzo Snow: “As man is God once was; As God is, man may be” (*Aaronic Priesthood manual 2: Who Am I?* [sa]:[sp]). It is the sacrifice of God to die so that creation may be redeemed, and the alchemical crucible forms the microcosm of this process. If God must die, then so too must the alchemist and his metals. The alchemist treats his metal and subsequently himself like a dying god. At the moment of death the dying god returns. The end of one vegetative cycle marks the beginning of the next, like the phoenix born of the ashes of its own death. The *lapis* is *the* symbol of the dying god that has returned – perfect and all-conquering.

### 8.3. Authorship and Cosmology

This idea that God and Death should be equated has found its way into the discourse of authorship as well. Many years ago Roland Barthes (1977:142) declared, in avant-garde fashion, that the author was dead:

As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.



The kind of an author that Barthes (1977:142-3,145) is referring to is subsequently clarified for the reader short while later:

The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the ‘human person’... The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child.

Barthes has thus *constructed* an image of the author in the image of God – a true authoritarian, the singular cause of the creative Word, an omnipotent entity of singular meaning and direction, the Supreme Creator of the text. This “Author-God” is a metaphysical abstraction, a fiction of the absolute (Burke 1998:27). It is arguable whether or not the author ever truly existed in such an absolute fashion during the historical periods that Barthes mentions. “Barthes’s entire polemic is grounded in the false assumption that if a magisterial status is denied the author, then the very concept of the author becomes otiose”, according to Seán Burke (1998:27). However, this is not what is important. What *is* crucial to the discourse is that Roland Barthes has constructed an Author that is *worthy* of deicide. The great King, the great God of literature is engendered and simultaneously dethroned. At the moment that the god is created, he is killed. The presumption of a hermeneutic circle of meaning created solely from the mind of the despot God, and in accordance with His wishes, is crushed. Like a crown ripped from the head of a king, its shattered gems float loosely in the sea of symbolism, ready to be organised by the new mastery of the linguistic code at the expense of the authoritarian spark of genius. The author has become the martyr-God of his own text, the hermeneutician its intercessor and oracle. As Paul Ricoeur (in Knapp & Michaels 1987:51) suggests, in living speech “the subjective intention of the speaker and the discourse’s meaning overlap each other in such a way that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means and what his discourse means”.

This study disputes if the supreme literary “Author” has ever truly died, quite simply because he may never have existed. However, within the disciplines of interpretation and speculation the discourse is perpetually aware that “the highest grade of reality is only reached by signs” (Pierce qtd. in Bloom 2005:24). It is thus the symbolic act, the symbolic declaration that is important. Neil Gaiman (2004:570) surmises as much in the narrative of his fictional *American Gods*. “In this sorry world [the world of the gods], the symbol is the thing”. The author’s death is a symbolic gesture, the final, inevitable consequence of authorship as a type of cosmology. The author comes to occupy the same space as the dying god.

Barthes’s murderous move has a political agenda: “If God died in the nineteenth century, according to Nietzsche, what is the bet that the victim of the twentieth century will not turn out to be the *creator*, the author, the heresy of the historical materialism of the century of machines?” (Virilio 2006:21). The “Death of the Author” is Barthes’s equivalent of Nietzsche’s death of God. The death of the author may well be an attempt to liberate anti-theological

activity within literature and to establish the “purity of the page, words written in the absence of Gods, Muses and mortals” (Burke 1998:9,23). “The pure work implies the disappearance of the poet-speaker” according to Stéphane Mallarmé (1995:51).

And yet, Barthes’s philosophy is inexorably tied to the theologies and mythologies that he tries to overwrite. The “concept of the author is never more alive than when it is pronounced dead”, according to Burke (1998:7). The dying god will always return. The regenerative cycles inherent to Nature will have out. As soon as the author was dead, Barthes began to call for his return: “It is not that the Author may not ‘come back’ in the Text, in *his* text, but he then does so as a ‘guest’... his life no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work”, Barthes writes (qtd. in Burke 1998:31, emphasis added). There are a number of structuralist and critical considerations that are introduced with such a statement. The hermeneutic circle of meaning is reformed, but with a different emphasis. Writing, and subsequently interpretation, becomes a linguistic indulgence. The death of the author becomes the closure of the representational view of language and the beginning of the autonomy of language to arrange itself (Burke 1998:43). These technical-philosophical aspects are not of importance here, however. What is important is the understanding that the Author-God, the Father of the text has died. The “Text” now becomes the absolute linguistic reality, so that the author is *reborn* as a son to his own text. The author adopts the most mythic of positions. He dies to his old self, relinquishes his authority, and at that intersection of space-time is reborn as the Son – the would be successor, the author as a phenomenon of literary inquisition and stylistic pleasure.

This Author-Son is like the High-Priest of the literary movement. He is a conduit, a vessel, a prophetic voice, the god of writing subservient to the will and autocracy of the Absolute – the transcendental “Text”. He is, again, similar to what he was in classical antiquity and Medieval literature – a scriptor with no power to originate, but open to the influence of “Language” (Burke 1995:xvii). Language has become the new Absolute, the new God of inspiration. The Author thus moves from signified to signifier. Yet it is the Son of Words, the new signifier and dictator of the will of Language who has the authority. According to Derrida (2004:96-7):

[The god of writing] is opposed to its other (father, sun, life, speech, origin or orient, etc.), but as that which at once supplements and supplants it. [He] extends or opposes by repeating or replacing. [In other words, absolute meaning, absolute language is repeated and displaced because it is reinterpreted]. By the same token, the figure of [the god of writing] takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it resists and substitutes for. But it thereby opposes *itself*, passes into its other, and the messenger-god is truly a god of the absolute passage between opposites... The god of writing is thus at once its father, his son, and himself. He cannot be assigned a fixed spot in any play of differences.

The author is therefore subjected to the same perpetual chain of signification as the *lapis*. In the quest for the “ultimate signified”, the signified and signifier have merged, and the entire symbology refers back to itself.

#### 8.4. The Phoenix-God

It is remarkable how closely this pattern mimics mythology. In agrarian mythology, the dying god, who is the father of the crop, is often reborn as his own son. This usually occurs through the mediation of his wife. The total deity is therefore understood to be a bisexual triad – God the Father, God the Son, and God the “Mother of God”. Theology demands that Father and Son are one and the same, co-eternal since the beginning of time (Leach 1976:20). The Father thus gives birth to a Son that is at once himself, via the Mother. The divine Mother of the trinity is subsequently considered to be sister, wife, and mother to God. In Egypt this peculiar Trinitarian expression of the Godhead is seen in the triad of Osiris, Isis and Horus. Chapter Two and Three have discussed the nature of Osiris as the Egyptian prototype of the dying god. He was betrayed by his brother, Set, who eventually became a kind of representation of evil within the Egyptian pantheon. It is Set who killed him and ultimately mutilated his body by cutting it into numerous pieces and then spreading these across the land. Isis, the wife of Osiris, embarked on a quest to recover the body of her husband. Upon the recovery of the pieces she put them together and had a necrophilic union with her departed husband (Witt 1971:37). The offspring of this union was Horus, the conquering child, who aided his mother in the revivification of his father and his ascendancy to heaven (Budge 1973a:82).

According to Plutarch<sup>38</sup> the soul of Osiris was revered as the Egyptian *bennu* bird, or phoenix. It was a symbol of life arising out of death in an eternal cycle (Witt 1971:44). The phoenix, as mentioned before, is a perfect symbol of the dying god. According to legend, the bird would immolate itself upon a funeral pyre only to be reborn from its own ashes. Philosophically, the death of the phoenix is a selfish act of martyrdom for the sake of immortality. It is a space of huge contradiction. The bird conceives itself in a mythic, auto-erotic ritual where death and life are a simultaneous occurrence, just like the ouroboros – the serpent that devours itself at the same time that it extends its own life.

Barthes’s reintroduction of the author is a similarly mystical concept: “A little like Dionysus, or Christ, the author must be dead before he can return. In a sense too, he must continue to be dead though he has returned” (Burke 1998:30). Or, in the words of Harold Bloom (2005:52), “the infinite God, is at once *ayin* or ‘nothingness’ and *ehyeh* or I AM, absolute absence and absolute presence”. The Father is eternally dead (or dead in eternity), seemingly cold and distant, while the Son is the living bridge between this world and the Father, a source of light and life, the proof that The Resurrection is true. They are dichotomous manifestations of the same principle.

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<sup>38</sup> The account of Plutarch may be problematic because of its chronological lateness. However, his text best serves the argument at hand and we are thus concerned with a solar Osiris and not his lunar manifestation.

The *lapis philosophorum*, like the reappearing author, is a manifestation of these principles. It is a representation of divine fecundity, the God who would not die and was reborn as an androgynous Son, the God who is death and yet who transcends death. It is a cycle without beginning and without end. Authorship and alchemy are thus intricately linked through their understanding of and dependence on cosmology, and it is most fitting that JK Rowling would choose the phoenix as such a strong symbol throughout her novels. The riddle that she introduces in *The Deathly Hallows* perhaps summarises her position the best. “Which came first, the phoenix or the flame?” Rowling asks us. It is Luna Lovegood who answers on her behalf that “a circle has no beginning” (Rowling 2007:472).

This riddle mirrors a question that has plagued authorship for centuries. Can the discourse speak of an absolute beginning, of an origin of inspiration? According to Nietzsche, “all our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary upon an unknown text, one that is perhaps unknowable but still felt” (qtd. in Bloom 2005:26). Such a perspective, remarkably ethereal for a philosopher infatuated with the immediacy of life apart from any transcendental reality, turns the author into a cultural radio – a voice for the frequency of the now. The author mediates this “unknown text”, but questions about Rowling’s “ingenuity”, “inspiration”, or “originality” as an author are far from resolved. There is no beginning or end to the discourse. Rowling’s appropriation of mythic symbolism is, like the phoenix, part of a new cycle, born of the old discourse and paving the way to new interpretation and new speculation.

#### **8.5. Influence, Interpretation and Disputation**

It is impossible within the scope of this research to arrive at any definite conclusion to the metaphysical questions that have already been posited. However, in asking the questions, the critic may become more aware of the problematic terrain of authorship and its reading. Simply asking the questions may help criticism to understand its own interpretations and expectations. These ideas are best explained by remaining with the mythic idea of the phoenix.

To Rowling the phoenix is an important symbol. More than once it has saved her protagonist from the abyss of death. Yet in *The Deathly Hallows* both the phoenix and Albus Dumbledore have departed. It is up to Harry Potter to re-enact the principles of the alchemical god: sacrificial death and return. Irrespective of the hopes or fears of readers prior to the release of *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry Potter has seen death *and* he has survived it. Rowling has answered her audience’s fears. She has also expressed its cultural hopes. Harry Potter, as a sacrificial lamb, is an important symbolic statement. It illustrates that Rowling is attentive to her Christian influence. At the same time, it is an expression of the alchemical *lapis* and the mysticism invoked by the cult of the dying god. It illustrates the pervasiveness of mythic thinking in today’s culture, such that the reader need not adhere to a particularly Christian bias to appreciate the work of Harry Potter. Whatever her ideological outlook, Rowling has created a hero that is

an affectionate reflection of these philosophies. The very hero that she engenders does more than mimic; he re-establishes the philosophies of cosmology and alchemy. He is a poignant sign of the interpretation of authorship described above. There is subsequently a mystical bond between Rowling, the author-heroine, and Harry Potter, who has fast become a hero of cultural legend.

Within a cyclical system of alchemical signification, the critical discourse need not bother itself with aspects of “originality” or even “ingenuity” when it comes to the work of JK Rowling. Those who would condemn the *Harry Potter* novels as a mass-idolised version of mythic folk-tales have perhaps blinded themselves to the nature of the human *zeitgeist*, and the repeated cultural need to hear these stories. Symbols such as the *lapis* and the phoenix, transferring their signification to the dying Harry Potter, allow the discourse to overlook aspects of originality. Like the *lapis*, the phoenix declares that there doesn’t need to be a beginning or an end. There will be another Harry Potter. There will be another Rowling. The author is a “dying god” hence she is dispensable. She will always return. Similarly, the mythic text will die and find itself reborn perpetually, as long as there is a culture willing to receive it. A new author will pick up the strands of discourse, and add his or her “mark” of originality – a new way of understanding, a new style of communicating the Universal Text. This author is the true “Son” of the transcendental Text, a rebirthing of antiquity in the shape of modernity. He is an alchemist to the world of literature.

This cyclical logic is also the domain of the reader. If the transcendental Text can never be “accessed” except by mediation, then every act of writing, as with every act of reading, is an interpretation. According to Bloom (2005:50):

The reader is to the poem what the poet is to his precursor—every reader is therefore an ephebe, every poem a forerunner, and every reading an act of “influencing,” that is, of being influenced *by* the poem and of influencing any other reader to whom your reading is communicated.

Author and interpreter thus stand on equal footing as far as influence and meaning are concerned. For some, the “death of the author” has been tantamount to the idea of the “birth of the reader”. A work is perhaps never complete until it is read and the cycle of communication is completed. What is “canonised” is a result of this very interaction. Can the “readers” influence culture enough that a work is considered canonical – in other words, fundamentally important enough in how it connects with society that it may be recognised as an historic work of significance? Ultimately this is the most problematic of any of the discussions surrounding the authorship of Harry Potter. According to Harold Bloom (2005:52), the process of canonisation is the most extreme form of interpretation, a manifest result of “misreading”. As this study interprets it, “canonisation” implies that the text shifts from the immediate into the historic. It is given a new meaning, a new context, and is perpetually “misread” because literary interpretation affects subsequent readings as much as the original text has. The term



“misreading” is not a derogatory adjective for accidental misinterpretation. Instead it describes a critical displacement of meaning, affected through the act of interpretation. As Buck and Brown (1980:88) contest, “It is true for the actions of others in particular that their hermeneutic presupposes that notice be taken of them, and this means verbal notice”.

Misreading, which is the domain of the sliding signifier, the god of writing, is the most natural of processes. It results from any stage of internalisation and rationalisation of the work. It is the habitation of the *lapis philosophorum* – a liminal signifier that is also always the higher sign. Like the act of misreading, the *lapis* always *refers* to the goal and completion of the great alchemical work, to God, and to the transcendental. It simultaneously *represents* these things as well, becoming the microcosm of this reality and not just its signifier. (In other words, it becomes simultaneously the reality and the simulacrum.) Misreading, which entails that the act of reading and criticism has become a *metanarrative* to the “original”, clearly allows for divergent voices and opinions to add to the mythos and reception of the original text. How Rowling’s novels are critiqued influences the way in which cultures read them, eventually perhaps more so than the novels themselves. In addition, what is internalised and redirected via the work of fandom may have a similar effect. The voice of the established critic will usually be heard more clearly than the voice of the lay fan because of the pedestal that contemporary society affords him. This does not mean that the fan is ever silenced, particularly in the era of global mass communication. Each “misreading”, however aberrant, academic or amateur, begins to add to the significance of the source text. If the value of *Harry Potter* resides in how it is received in society, then perhaps criticism should focus on just how diverse the readings of Rowling’s texts have been. More so than any other work of fiction in recent memory, *Harry Potter* has strongly polarised its intended audience. It would be shallow to assume that this polarisation is merely a pseudo-religious squabble.

The greatest indication for such a polarisation is not that some Christian readers have boycotted *Harry Potter* because of its thematic “witchcraft”. Nor is it the fact that pro-*Harry Potter* audiences have critiqued such opinions as being misinformed, archaic or just plain “ignorant”. Admittedly, a number of persons critiquing *Harry Potter* may do so without having read the key texts and this is particularly problematic from an academic perspective. Ultimately, the reason for such strong polarisation may be an issue of *authorship*. The pertinent hermeneutic question is not simply, what is “present” in the text, but what was the author’s intended meaning? Chapters Two through Seven have elaborated upon the wealth of symbolism that Rowling utilises, but have simultaneously illustrated that this symbolism can be interpreted in a number of ways. Ultimately it may be difficult to ascertain precisely what Rowling means when she evokes the imagery of the *lapis* within a society of organised witchcraft. If the meaning of a work is simply what the author intended to convey to an “ideal” audience (Culler 2001:52), then the task may seem simple. However, the strong polarisation of readers toward or away from the perceived ideology of the *Harry Potter* novels indicates that interpretative disagreements abound. To ask what Rowling intended when she moulded her protagonist around the

alchemical ideal of the *lapis* is to end up in a quagmire of “misreading”. The *lapis* is such a strongly archetypal image that it may end up connoting meaning that was never consciously intended. In addition, the *Harry Potter* novels themselves function as Rowling’s “misreading” of alchemy: Rowling’s magical world is itself a comment upon the universe of alchemy, and this fact potentially generates a new context for its symbolism. It is Rowling’s reinterpretation of mythology that has opened up the critical speculation that surrounds the *Harry Potter* franchise. Subsequently it may be impossible to determine what the “original” or “intended” meanings are when their symbolism is diffused through a history of variable signifiers.

Simply put, this means that Rowling herself has opened up the speculation surrounding her novels because the critical audience may never be able to determine what the “original” meanings of her symbols are. What they mean to the readers, what they mean to her, and what they meant when they first began to be “formed” as historical signifiers may be entirely different. Each interpretation becomes a misreading of a misreading. Each reading of alchemy, Rowling’s included, becomes a type of “defence”, a reaction to influence, and an attempt to influence (Bloom 2005:54). To better understand this, the audience need only look at the symbolic phoenix. It is merely one of the symbols that Rowling employs, but its interpretation is deeply indebted to cultural expectations.

The phoenix has often been regarded as a symbol of resurrection and the hope of eternal life that awaits the departed. Fox (2006:639) recalls that, “Among Pagan men of letters, the phoenix had long exerted a particular spell. It... united the mystery of a home in Egypt with the inauguration of a New Age. Christians had been quick to use the bird as a symbol of their own resurrection”. It is a curious and intriguing development that within the space of a few centuries, the Christian church had come to view the phoenix as a symbol of Christ itself. This so soon after Peter implored his followers that “when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord [Jesus] the Messiah, we did not rely on cunningly contrived myths” (2 *Peter* 1.16, Stern 1998:16). Peter may have been eager to dissociate himself from the myths of the past and to establish the resurrection of Christ as the only true Resurrection. He had to establish the *authority* and *authorship* of his God over what he perceives to be the only *true* text of the resurrection. Pagan ideals of “dying gods” and universal rebirthing do not fit into his theology. Yet it is possible to imagine from his statement that he was certainly aware of them. The interesting development is that tradition has undone him, and now the phoenix stands as a dichotomous symbol. It is both a symbol of the Christ as well as of the Egyptian solar deity, be that Ra or Osiris-Horus. It could just as easily be interpreted that the phoenix should be read as a symbol of the Empress. In China this has most certainly been the reading, and subsequently the phoenix is imagined to be the bride of the Imperial Dragon (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:752). Such a reading does fit within the alchemical paradigms of the *Harry Potter* novels.

An ideology of universalism does not see such a multiplicity of interpretation as a problem. On the contrary, such an ideology is eager to assimilate the disparity of meanings and unite it into a single grand signifier, a supreme symbolic archetype. Rowling's "multifaith" Hogwarts performs such a function. Its universal establishment allows the disparity of meanings to float in and out of one another, and point to the ultimate sign, which in Rowling's case would appear to be the Christ-*lapis*. Questions about which ideology the phoenix, the dragon or the *lapis* signify become inconsequential. Each interpretation may simply represent another "misreading" of Rowling's text. Those readers who choose to interpret the phoenix and the *lapis* as symbols of Christian redemption, and to extend this analogy to the other symbols that Rowling employs will undoubtedly find evidence for their interpretation. Those readers who would choose to interpret the phoenix as a supremely "Pagan" (i.e. non-Christian) symbol, will find evidence to support their interpretation as well. The literary stage is set for an ideological dispute of immense proportion, and importance. This ideological dispute is the best way in which the discourse can reveal cultural mores and that which society deems to be appropriate and significant. *Harry Potter*, by virtue of its controversy, may again highlight to the literary world the nature of its interrogative methods.

As a "misreading" of Rowling's novels, the *Harry Potter* films clearly illustrate that the signifying process of authorship is simultaneously mutable and derivative. A visual analysis of the *Harry Potter* films has permitted an insight into the process of authorship and signification, illustrating that signification is a product of the relationship between creation and interpretation, both processes being interdependent. The act of narrative creation implies the removal of certain symbols from a prior context and their rebirth into a "new" form. This perpetual "re"-placement of signs is not unlike the cycle of death and rebirth found in alchemy. Authorship requires a godlike act of regenerating a cultural symbol within a contextual locus. Subsequently, the "theory of authorship... has its tenebrous place in our sense of human destiny and its narratives" (Burke 1995:206). Authorship remains *theological* as long as there is a transcendent sign, an Author-God, or Absolute Language. From the perspective of Seán Burke (1998:205):

Among the manifold tragedies and blasphemies of the human is that the terms of our thought are still so explicitly theological as to allow us to grasp transcendence and absence altogether more surely than the distinctively human, that ever-singular place of desire, will and history from which spring all acts of authorship.

Whether this is as much of a "tragedy" as Burke surmises is a moot point. However it does remind the reader just how much cultural thinking is still influenced by a cosmology built upon notions of dying gods. The author and the alchemist are not so different. The alchemist believes that procuring the *lapis* is akin to having perfect knowledge of God. Similarly, those authors that Barthes labels "savants" have become true masters of their art (Burke 1998:33). They are men of letters as literary heroes, "Logothetes", and their experience supersedes the mundane. They know the inner workings of the supreme Language. Presumably, they can forge the divine script in the here-and-now. Like the alchemist, they have perfect knowledge of the creative God,

even if Barthes's understanding of Language is atheological. The real "tragedy" is that both the alchemist and the author have died for their art, and it is a necessary tragedy, for without death neither would have become immortal, neither would have become a cultural god.



## CHAPTER 9

### *Conclusion*

#### 9.1. Summary of Chapters

The main aim of this study has been to describe the symbolism of the *lapis philosophorum* in the *Harry Potter* films by undertaking a hermeneutic analysis of its meaning. In conjunction with this, an unveiling of the alchemical symbolism in the *Harry Potter* films has allowed for ancillary discussions regarding the nature of alchemical hermeneutics and the ideological implications of its approach. These chief aims have been presented in Chapter One along with a brief summary of the theoretical framework that this study has employed.

In order to establish the symbolism of the *lapis*, Chapter Two commenced its critical evaluation by providing an overview of alchemical theory, focusing on its ideological assumptions and its idiomatic language. A discussion of the relevance and importance of the alchemical worldview in the *Harry Potter* films has revealed how their meaning is constructed, and how the *lapis* is able to function as a vehicle for the transmission of the alchemical worldview. The chapter has served to highlight essential alchemical concepts such as the universal ideas of death and rebirth, androgyny, and harmony. It has been shown that an understanding of these paradigms facilitates a deeper appreciation of the events that unfold during the *Harry Potter* texts.

Chapter Three has developed these comparisons further and detailed how alchemical philosophy is translated into the chief stages of the *opus alchymicum*, or alchemical work. In order to illuminate the pervasive use of alchemical metaphors in the *Harry Potter* texts, the chapter outlined how the symbolism of the three alchemical stages of *nigredo*, *albedo* and *rubedo* is maintained throughout the narrative of the *Harry Potter* novels and films, the naming of principle characters, and the presence of fantastical creatures.



Such comparisons have allowed for the study to establish its base premise that alchemy is the prime metaphor through which the symbolism of the *Harry Potter* films can be accessed. Subsequently, Chapters Four through Seven have been able to undertake a detailed analysis of particular visual elements in the *Harry Potter* films that link to the *lapis philosophorum*. The analysis has highlighted that alchemical symbols are present in the films and that their presence may convey a particular worldview. Principally, Chapter Four has considered the implications of an alchemical reading of the *Harry Potter* films and contrasted the worldview of the films with that presented by Rowling in her novels. The chapter has also provided an interpretation of the *lapis* as a signifier for a universal perspective on alchemical practice, as opposed to a purely Orthodox Christian reading of an alchemical narrative. By comparing how Rowling's novels and the *Harry Potter* films interpret and treat the signification of the *lapis*, the chapter has managed to illustrate a degree of symbolic interdependence. Not only has it been shown that the films are aware of the greater alchemical narrative, but that they have added their own supplementary symbolism and signification.

Particularly recurrent visual symbols, such as the serpent or winged sphere, have been discussed in Chapters Five and Six. Highlighting the idea of visual hybridisation, these chapters have developed the argument that a group of apparently unrelated symbols, such as the serpent, the phoenix, the lion and the sphere, can have a unity of meaning derived from their alchemical context. These chapters have detailed how each of these icons can refer to the *lapis philosophorum*, and how the visual context of these symbols is able to reveal a unified concept and worldview. By analysing these symbols it has been illustrated that the *lapis* itself may function as a signifier for a host of archetypal concepts, described in this study as the "absolute signified".

Chapter Seven has extended these fundamental arguments to propose an interpretation of the *lapis* as an esoteric signifier, pointing to a metaphysical appreciation of cosmology and heroic destiny. As with the previous chapters, Chapter Seven has presented a thorough consideration of the functioning of signifying systems and the implications of a hermeneutic reading in the construction of meaning. It is clear from the arguments presented in these chapters that the visual analysis of alchemical symbols is not a simple, unilateral undertaking. The mode of analysis has highlighted the mutability of alchemical signs and the dynamic nature of signifying systems.

Chapter Eight represents the culmination of this hermeneutic model. The chapter has considered the interrelated concepts of alchemy and authorship under the assumption that their theoretical frameworks are related. The chapter has detailed how the hermeneutic discipline is able to evaluate not only the potential meaning of texts, but also the method of their critical reception

and significance. It has subsequently been established that both alchemy and the theoretical discipline of authorship ask similar fundamental questions relating to creativity and the relationship between man, God and Creation. As an extension of its hermeneutic reading, this study has illustrated that both alchemy and authorship touch upon aspects of the transcendent and the immanent, and these are questions that are mirrored in the heroic quest and destiny of Harry Potter and the relationship between the protagonist and his creator, JK Rowling.

The current chapter concludes the discussions of this study by presenting a summary of the dialogue of the previous chapters. It also considers the contribution of the study to the general discourse of academic Visual Studies, highlighting the limitations of this approach and concluding with suggestions for supplementary research.

## **9.2. Contribution of the Study**

The primary hypothesis of this study has been that the *Harry Potter* texts can be analysed from within an alchemical framework, and that this alchemical framework is able to transmit a particular worldview. As such, this study has contributed to the following areas of academic research.

To begin with, the study has revealed that alchemical symbolism is pertinent to understanding the *Harry Potter* novels and that this symbolism should not be treated as incidental. This is not necessarily an innovative academic contribution. The introduction has already mentioned that John Granger's (2003; 2006; 2007a) writings provide an accessible interpretation of alchemy in Rowling's works. This study, however, diverges from the works of Granger in questioning whether or not Rowling's alchemical symbolism needs to be treated exclusively as a signifier for a Christian worldview.

Furthermore, this study has extended the premise of a literature analysis to include a study of the *Harry Potter* texts as a visual phenomenon. As such, this study has contributed to the discourse of Visual Studies through analysing the *Harry Potter* films while treating these films and the novels as related texts. This study has proposed that the *Harry Potter* films also utilise an alchemical visual language, and the argument has been substantiated through an analysis of a series of interrelated visual icons. Through the hermeneutic process of interpreting these symbols, this study has contributed to a further understanding of how alchemical language can be translated across media. A number of the alchemical images cited in this study have been appropriated from historical manuscripts, illustrating the context of their signification. While these visual symbols are not "original creations" their clever juxtaposition works like an

alchemical alphabet, pointing the viewer to a subtle affirmation of the worldview embedded in the *Harry Potter* films. Additionally, there have been incidents where an analysis of unique visual icons, such as the “Kundalini candles” fashioned in the shape of a human spine, has exhibited a progression toward a unique alchemical vision that represents a novel expression of esoteric ideals. This study is distinctive in its detailed analysis of alchemical symbols in the *Harry Potter* films, and more particularly in questioning the method of their interpretation.

Subsequently the theoretical approach has allowed for a number of philosophical considerations, enabling the study to contribute to a hermeneutic analysis of how signifying systems function. Utilising the alchemical framework of the novels and films, this study has highlighted how alternate ideologies can be transmitted through a single icon: the *lapis*. This study has posited that the signification of the *lapis* is a multiplicity, functioning as a syncretic amalgamation of ideas. In effect, this study proposes that the sign can work as a palimpsest, retaining the influence of a number of cultures. As such, the theoretical concept of the “sign” is revealed to have a number of layers or dimensions, and the interpretation of symbolism is announced as an intricate process of interchangeable meaning as opposed to a unilateral abstraction. This approach has questioned the nature of cultural interpretation and the validity of claims surrounding the reception of Rowling’s alchemical text. A sign that is mutable implies a variance in reading, and this study has contributed to a unique interpretation of the relationship between alchemy and authorship theories.

### **9.3. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research**

Due to the highly syncretic nature of the symbolism in the *Harry Potter* films, the only reasonable term that this study has been able to coin to refer to the worldview transmitted by the alchemical symbols is that of “Christian universalism”. Subsequently the greatest limitation of this study is the very fact that it has sought some form of unificatory theory, some grand appraisal that can bring together a seemingly endless discord of images. In coining the label “Christian universalism” to describe Rowling’s symbolic ideology this study is already assuming that the discordant elements within its symbolism must be united. In part this is influenced by the alchemical search for unity and androgyny, but this does not negate the fact that such symbolic unity may never have been the purpose. Rowling’s novels, and in particular the *Harry Potter* films, may subsequently have utilised apparently ‘Christian’ and ‘Pagan’ symbolism together because they found both sets of symbols to be poignant metaphors. It may simply be incidental that the films highlight some ideology of interdependency. While the theoretical framework of this study can be justified by textual and contextual evidence, it is still based upon the presumed critical conventions of a hermeneutic framework.

The same criteria apply to many of the authors quoted in this study, and in particular Carl Jung (1983, 1898, 1993). Jung has been cited as a source on alchemical reception because of his deep insight into the interrelatedness of its symbols. Highlighting the author's assessment does not, per se, indicate that this study is promoting his overriding psychological interpretation of those relationships. This study has not attempted to present the *Harry Potter* films as a psychological assessment, nor has it attempted to prove or manifest the anthropological and sociological assumptions of authors such as Campbell (1974, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c, 1993), Frazer (2003) or Graves (1999). While the mythic notion of the "dying god" or "resurrection deity" is employed to better facilitate a discussion of alchemical philosophy, this study is not intended to advocate the idea that all mythology or world religion should be exclusively interpreted from within these paradigms.

Furthermore, while recognition has been given to the syncretic assimilation of archetypal symbols in the *Harry Potter* films, this study has neglected to fully consider the implications of the relationship between traditional Christian iconography and the universalism denoted by this study. It is beyond the scope of this research to question whether the term "Christian universalism" implies a Christ-centric form of Cosmic Humanism, a postmodern Christian Orthodoxy, or a secularisation of Christian iconography. In other words, this study has avoided a consideration of how readers will respond to its use of the term "Christian universalism", and subsequently to Rowling's use of universal symbols. Chapter Eight of this study has maintained that philosophically the issue is unimportant because the framework of alchemy implies a hybridisation of symbols and a continual contextual reinterpretation. However, this is not to say the interpretation of the term "Christian universalism" is not ideologically or philosophically important within other contexts.

The nature of the interpretation of Rowling's texts does highlight a fundamental discourse that cannot be adequately expressed within this study's scope: the question of what defines a Christian symbol. Is a Christian symbol acknowledged as such because it is so named, because of cultural consensus, or because it has a contextual Biblical source? John Granger's (2007/11/13) argument illustrates that a symbol can be interpreted as Christian based solely on the literary and cultural context of its appropriation. By comparison this study has maintained that those same symbols can be interpreted from a completely different perspective, and that their use in a Christian literary tradition does not necessarily imply that their origin or current signification is such. It is a debate that is highlighted through this study, but unfortunately not concluded by it. Respectable discussion of the topic requires not only a consideration of authorship and hermeneutic reception, but also an extensive background in Divinity Studies. The topic would take the study away from a hermeneutic analysis and into a theologically

centred analysis of the practice of hermeneutics itself. As such, these considerations are mentioned as grounds for subsequent research.

In addition, this study has indicated that the contemporary perspective on authorship is still affected by the symptomatic interpretation that the authorial process is influenced by, and in response to, a complex social context. Language is a theological medium, or else the source of inspiration is theologised. This study has adhered to these abstract distinctions because it is outside of the sphere of its authority to posit any distinct relation between the author and the “ultimate” source of signification. It has therefore been far from the intention of this study to provide evidence for a theologically autocratic reading of the signification process, in other words one that argues that all symbolism derives from God. Neither has it been the intention of this study to speculate that the “ultimate signified”, whether this be the manifest *lapis* or the Absolute, is the result of the collective psychological unconscious. It is not within the jurisdiction of this study to posit what the nature of this “ultimate signified” is, only to illustrate that this is the highest point of conceptual aggregation. It is called the “ultimate signified” because this is as far as the study has been willing to take the chain of signification. Beyond this perceivably ethereal or abstract point no further speculation is propagated.

Outside of the theoretical framework, this study has also limited its interpretation of the symbols in the *Harry Potter* films to a few selected visual examples. It would be impossible to present a detailed analysis of each and every visual symbol employed in the *Harry Potter* films, even if the symbolism concentrated upon is purely alchemical. Subsequent studies may wish to focus on a diachronic appraisal of the host of symbols not mentioned in this study. There are alchemical markings that appear, for example, on the tattoos that cover Sirius Black, and in numerous other books and objects found scattered throughout the *Harry Potter* films. In addition, a great deal of the symbolism within the *Harry Potter* films can also be correlated with the symbolism of Freemasonry, in part because both share an alchemical foundation. It is possible to contrast the successive stages of metaphoric death and rebirth in the *Harry Potter* texts with the degrees of initiation described by Albert Pike (1871:[sp]) in *Morals and Dogma of the ancient accepted Scottish rite of Freemasonry*. While Masonic initiation was mentioned in passing in Chapter Seven of this study, there is a wealth of symbolism within its ritual that is invaluable to deciphering Harry Potter’s heroic progression throughout the novels.

At the same time it should also be noted that there are mythic symbols occurring in the *Harry Potter* films that have been purposefully excluded from this study because their discussion would be more appropriate within an alternate historical and theoretical context. While this study has posited that alchemy is the *predominant* metaphor through which the films should be analysed, it cannot be claimed that it is the exclusive metaphor. Similarly, this study has not



attempted to undertake any analysis of where the *Harry Potter* films differ from the novels, outside of the few alchemical incidents noted. Variations in the construction of the hero, denouement and narrative significance between the films and the novels reveal ideological discrepancies of importance to an academic undertaking. In particular, subsequent studies may wish to focus on the visual presentation of Harry Potter himself, and question why Hollywood's heroic prototype is so significantly different from Rowling's. It has not fallen within the scope of this study to analyse such archetypal presentations of cultural stereotypes, or the handling of their gender relations. Most importantly, just as this study has posited a relationship between the heroic author and her character, additional studies may wish to emphasise the relationship between the icon of the actor and the icon of the hero. Where do the lines blur between Harry Potter and his actor, Daniel Radcliffe, and what have his subsequent career choices, such as to appear in the recent rendition of the politically charged *Equus*, meant to the interpretation and reception of the Harry Potter persona? Such questions could not have been diligently considered within the limited alchemical framework of this study, yet the theoretical questions that this study has asked regarding the relationship of the source to the author, and of "re"-interpretation and the creative act, can just as easily be extended to the study of filmic versus literary representations of the hero.

#### 9.4. In Conclusion

The impact of the *Harry Potter* novels is unabated months after the release of *The Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007), and the five films released to date (*The Philosopher's Stone* (Columbus 2001), *The Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuaron 2004), *The Goblet of Fire* (Newell 2005), and *The Order of the Phoenix* (Yates 2007)) are approaching a global income of 4,5 billion Dollars (*Box Office Mojo* [sa]:[sp], *International Movie Database* [sa]:[sp]). Rowling's fantasy creation has connected with a large audience and brought alchemy back onto the world stage in a manner that surpasses a simple literary or visual gimmick. The alchemical ideology so deeply inscribed in the *Harry Potter* novels and films has informed not only the symbolism but also the tone and morality of Rowling's world.

Rowling's fascination with alchemy arrives at a time when alchemy has "emerged as the subject of interdisciplinary study *par excellence*" (Linden 2003:2). The study of alchemy is no longer limited to a study of the history of science. Disciplines as diverse as philosophy, religion, psychology, art history and literature studies have all benefited from a detailed interrogation of alchemy's rich tapestry of icons. Consequently the study of alchemy has been permitted to re-emerge from the ruin of Modern scientific speculation. Previously viewed as "a subject so outgrown and alien to the spirit of the age", the mention of alchemy had implied a revival of

“the wild theories and chimerical hopes of the past” (Kedzie 1891:113).

A contemporary understanding of alchemy again highlights its spiritual inclinations, and introduces a simultaneously psychological, religious, philosophical and emblematic means to answer the spiritual crises of the contemporary world. In this task, Rowling has succeeded admirably. Alchemy is her tool to express a complex spiritual answer to the perceived evils of the world: prejudice, hatred and selfishness, all of which lead to cultural and spiritual division. The symbolism of the *Harry Potter* films reveals a desire to reconstitute not only the divided self but also a divided society. They are an open invitation for the viewer to board the Hogwarts Express and embark on a journey from his own symbolic King’s Cross Station.

With Harry Potter and the *lapis* as their guide, the audience is permitted to question its own assumptions about the nature of love, friendship, sacrifice and heroism. Rowling’s fantastical creation has revealed that a person does not become a hero because he is granted access to divine gifts, but rather because of the choices he makes. In seeking to root out the source of evil and division in himself, the alchemical path is open to all readers. To become like the androgynous *lapis* is to discard everything that hinders our unique spiritual salvation.

It is the hope of this study that the detailed alchemical analyses that have been presented aid the audience of *Harry Potter* in understanding this complex moral dialectic in which they are taking part. The *Harry Potter* novels and films are no simple representation of the archetypal battle between the forces of light and darkness. They are a palimpsest of alchemical morality that points to a reconnection between humanity and its “ultimate signified”, whether that is the transcendental Absolute, the God of the Resurrection, or the *lapis* as a scintilla of spiritual salvation. It is the Gnostic Yeshua (Gospel of Thomas 22, in Barnstone & Meyer 2006:51) who expresses this idea most succinctly:

When you make the two into one,  
and when you make the inner like the outer  
and the outer like the inner  
and the upper like the lower,  
and when you make male and female into a single one,  
so that the male will not be male nor the female be female...  
then you will enter the kingdom.

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Frontispiece: <i>What use are torches, light or eyeglasses, if people will not see?</i> .....	vii
Figure 1: <i>Hogwarts statue, top</i> .....	32
Figure 2: <i>Hogwarts statue, bottom</i> .....	32
Figure 3: <i>Hermes Mercurius Trimegistus contemporaneus Moysi</i> .....	33
Figure 4: <i>Conjuge fratrem cum sorore et propina illis poculum amoris</i> .....	35
Figure 5: <i>Saturn as the Angel of Death</i> .....	43
Figure 6: <i>Harry Potter trapped</i> .....	43
Figure 7: <i>Voldemort before his rebirthing</i> .....	44
Figure 8: <i>Voldemort's rebirthing</i> .....	44
Figure 9: <i>Dolo Typhon Osyridem trucidat, artúsque illius Hinc inde dissipat</i> .....	46
Figure 10: <i>Harry swims in Hogwarts Lake during the second trial of the Triwizard Tournament</i> .....	53
Figure 11: <i>Harry in the prefects' bath with Moaning Myrtle</i> .....	53
Figure 12: <i>The Yule ballroom</i> .....	54
Figure 13: <i>The Philosopher's Stone</i> .....	57
Figure 14: <i>Fawkes the phoenix</i> .....	57
Figure 15: <i>The white stag</i> .....	58
Figure 16: <i>The Tower</i> .....	65
Figure 17: <i>Arrival at the Great Hall</i> .....	70
Figure 18: <i>The Hogwarts emblem</i> .....	70
Figure 19: <i>Golden fountain in the Ministry of Magic</i> .....	71
Figure 20: <i>General interior of the Great Hall</i> .....	71
Figure 21: <i>Detail of the mural above the wooden doors of the Great Hall</i> .....	73
Figure 22: <i>Image from Theatricum chemicum Britannicum</i> .....	74
Figure 23: <i>Two dragons engaged in eternity</i> .....	74
Figure 24: <i>The ouroboros</i> .....	75
Figure 25: <i>Mercury (Hermes) holds in both hands a caduceus</i> .....	76

Figure 26: <i>A scene from the Great Hall showing two murals</i> .....	77
Figure 27: <i>A “cut out” of the front of the Great Hall from a printable paper diagram</i> .....	78
Figure 28: <i>Harry Potter’s philosophical egg</i> .....	79
Figure 29: <i>The opening of the egg</i> .....	79
Figure 30: <i>Der weg zu Christo</i> .....	81
Figure 31: <i>Tranquility</i> .....	82
Figure 32: <i>The rebis upon the winged globe</i> .....	83
Figure 33: <i>The rebis as Sol-Luna upon the winged globe</i> .....	84
Figure 34: <i>Make from the man and woman a circle</i> .....	85
Figure 35: <i>The large glass window in front of the Great Hall</i> .....	88
Figure 36: <i>Detail of the serpent in Figure 35</i> .....	89
Figure 37: <i>Interior shot of the Great Hall with the large glass windows in the background</i> .....	89
Figure 38: <i>The Serpent of Arabia</i> .....	90
Figure 39: <i>A dragon on the roof of the greenhouse</i> .....	92
Figure 40: <i>The dragon in the divination classroom</i> .....	92
Figure 41: <i>Three dragons embrace the Triwizard Cup</i> .....	93
Figure 42: <i>Dragon-like heads above the archways in the Department of Mysteries</i> .....	93
Figure 43: <i>A page from the book “Moste Potente Potions”</i> .....	99
Figure 44: <i>Python, Spiritus Mercurialis</i> .....	101
Figure 45: <i>The basilisk emerges from the mouth of a statue of Salazar Slytherin</i> .....	102
Figure 46: <i>The Dark Mark</i> .....	103
Figure 47: <i>The mark of the Death Eaters</i> .....	103
Figure 48: <i>Harry Potter fights the basilisk</i> .....	105
Figure 49: <i>Harry Potter approaches the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets</i> .....	105
Figure 50: <i>Goddess of fate as a serpent with seven heads</i> .....	106
Figure 51: <i>Neville’s Rememberall</i> .....	112
Figure 52: <i>A crystal ball from Harry’s divination lessons</i> .....	112
Figure 53: <i>The prophecy</i> .....	113
Figure 54: <i>Dumbledore traps Voldemort in a chaotic ball of water</i> .....	114

Figure 55: <i>The winged solar disk of the Egyptians</i> .....	115
Figure 56: <i>The winged sphere (aurum aurea) as the end product of the opus</i> .....	116
Figure 57: <i>The Godhead as a wheel of seven wheels</i> .....	117
Figure 58: <i>Hermes-Mercury with the lampstand</i> .....	117
Figure 59: <i>Frontispiece to “Utriusque Cosmi”, Vol I</i> .....	118
Figure 60: <i>The golden Snitch</i> .....	121
Figure 61: <i>Harry Potter is bathed in light as he grasps his predestined wand</i> .....	124
Figure 62: <i>Light emanating from the infant Harry Potter’s scar</i> .....	126
Figure 63: <i>Sirius Black is swallowed by the veil</i> .....	131
Figure 64: <i>The Order of the Phoenix arrive</i> .....	131
Figure 65: <i>Light and dark in an ethereal battle</i> .....	132
Figure 66: <i>The astronomy tower</i> .....	137
Figure 67: <i>The Kundalini candles</i> .....	137
Figure 68: <i>The serpent fire emerges from the spine of man</i> .....	138
Figure 69: <i>The djed pillar of Osiris</i> .....	138
Figure 70: <i>Sirius Black’s soul as a scintilla of light</i> .....	140
Figure 71: <i>The lake in the Forbidden Forest</i> .....	141