

Three Is a Magic Number: The Trinity Archetype in Harry Potter

Christopher Bell

University of Colorado Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA

The significance of the trinity archetype and the number three is recurrent in religions and myths around the world. Within the trinity archetype, each element is both distinct from and symbiotic with the other elements—that is to say, each stands apart from the others, but none can truly function alone. This can be seen throughout Greek mythology, for example, *The Moirae* and *The Musai*, and of course, through the Christian Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While the archetype of the trinity appears numerous times throughout the *Potter* series, at its very heart, the series is centrally focused on a triad of trinities: the Trio (Harry, Ron, and Hermione), the three Unforgivable Curses, and the three Deathly Hallows. It is the intersection of this triad of trinities—this “supertrinity”—that not only drive the *Potter* narrative, but connect the work so readily to the psyche of readers and fans; it is how we are harmonically programmed, in terms of understanding stories.

Keywords: Harry Potter, trinity archetype, trinity protagonist structure, contemporary mythology

Introduction

The past and the present and the future.
Faith and hope and charity.
The heart and the brain and the body
give you three as a magic number.

—Bob Dorough, *Schoolhouse Rock* (1973)

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005), a young Tom Riddle asks Horace Slughorn, “Can you only split your soul once? Wouldn’t it be better, make you stronger, to have your soul in more pieces? I mean, for instance, isn’t seven the most powerfully magical number, wouldn’t seven?” (Rowling, p. 466). Rowling herself answers this last question repeatedly throughout the series—a resounding “No”. Seven is not the most powerfully magical number. In the *Potter* verse, as in many other places in literature and mythology, the most powerfully magical number is three.

In many major and minor ways, Rowling continually returns to the number three as symbolic of what might be called “perfect balance”. And, at the very core, a trinity of triads are central to the story itself: the three Unforgivable Curses (Crucio, Imperio and Avada Kedavra), the three Deathly Hallows (the Resurrection Stone, the Elder Wand, and the Invisibility Cloak), and the most important of all, the Trio (Harry, Hermione, and Ron). In fact, the author intends to argue, quite strenuously, that Harry Potter is not even the main protagonist of the series; the protagonist is a classic trinity structure: Hero, Anti-Hero, and Heroine, with Harry, Ron, and Hermione

Christopher Bell, Ph.D., assistant professor attendant in the Department of Communication, University of Colorado Colorado Springs; Director of Center for Excellence in Communication.

filling those respective roles. None of the three can achieve without the other two; they are utterly symbiotic.

In each triad within the trinity of power in the *Potter* verse, each element is just as powerful as the other two, but specialized and unique—imbued with a particular locus of power rather exclusive to it. The relationship of each of these triads, both internally among its constituent elements and externally to the other two triads, comprises the central conflict of the series. Three is, in fact, the magic number for Harry Potter.

The Mythic Trinity

The number three is woven throughout the myths, religion, and literature of cultures across the world and spanning thousands of years. With ties to magic and mysticism, the number three and its resultant systems of organization are fundamental to the belief structures of many many cultures. From the simplest of modern myths—“death comes in threes”—to the complexities of the deity structures within Christian, Hindu, Greek, and Roman mythologies, the arrangement of threes is one of the key edifices by which people understand the universe.

For example, Greek mythology is full of references to threes. Kronos and Rhea, two of the 12 Titans, produced six children: three males and three females. Hera, Demeter, and Hestia were the daughters and Poseidon, Hades, and Zeus were the sons. When these children of the Titans ascended to Mount Olympus to rule as gods, the demiurgic triad of Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon ruled over them. Zeus, the god of the heavens, ruled the sky; Poseidon, the god of the sea, ruled the mortal plane; Hades, the god of the underworld, ruled below. This particular triad will be repeated later in Christian mythos, in Heaven, Earth, and Hell.

This triadic structure extends to the lesser deities of Greek mythology as well. *The Moirae* (or *The Fates*) were three sisters that held the thread of life of every mortal; Clotho spun the thread, Lachesis measured it, and Atropos cut it. The sisters represented the three phases of life: birth, aging, and death, and were depicted as the maiden, the woman, and the crone.

Similarly, *The Musai* (or *The Muses*) were made up of nine (i.e., three times three) goddesses: Euterpe (music), Polyhymnia (the sacred), Calliope (poetry), Terpsichore (dancing), Clio (history), Erato (lyric), Thalia (comedy), Melpomene (tragedy), and Urania (astronomy)—each lending their inspiration to a form of art significant to the Greeks (interestingly, originally, there were only three Muses: Aoide—song, Melete—practice, and Mneme—memory).

Greeks had no exclusive claim to the triadic mythological structure. The Romans, at divergent points in their imperial history, worshipped two separate triadic deities. The earliest form of the triad, referred to as the Archaic Triad, consisted of the gods Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus; the later form of the triad (the Capitoline Triad) replaced Mars and Quirinus with Juno and Minerva. Ancient Egyptians had their own triadic deity structures, including the father/mother/son trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus, the Thebian triad of Amun, Mut and Khonsu (in worship to which the temple at Luxor was constructed) and the Memphis triad of Ptah, Sekhmet and Nefertem. The Hindu Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer) embody the three stages of human life, and the Taoist Fu (Good Fortune), Lu (Prosperity), and Shou (Longevity), represented as “福祿寿”, which are the three keys to a good life.

The triadic structure does not necessarily require three separate entities. For instance, Hecate, goddess of the crossroads, witchcraft and necromancy, is often depicted with three separate aspects or even three separate heads:

dog, serpent, and horse (Bonney, 1992, p. 195). Additionally, “Her ring, scepter and crown represent the power of the one who, possessing the triad, embraces all” (Bonney, 1992, p. 196). The Hellenised Diana Nemorensis—Diana of Nemi—is often conflated with Hecate and is another goddess with a triadic aspect. In the “demotic spells” of the Greek magical papyri, the goddess Selene is described as:

Triple-voiced, triple-headed Selene,
Triple-pointed, triple-faced, triple-necked,
And goddess of the triple ways, who hold
Untiring flaming fire in triple baskets,
And you who oft frequent the triple way,
And rule the triple decades with three forms. (Betz, 2007, p. 84)

Of course, moving into the Christian era, the Holy Trinity emerged as primary: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, representing, in turn, Power, Love, and Knowledge (Sometimes this will be represented as omnipotence, benevolence, and omniscience). McMaster (1992) noted:

The three persons of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, though indivisibly one, each specialize. God the Father, the Yahweh of the Old Testament, is creator and lawgiver, strong in justice and discipline. God the Son, the Christ of the New Testament, is the redeemer, saving man out of love and through sacrifice. God the Holy Spirit, always a more mysterious entity, seldom appears as a character, but is familiar in iconography as the bird that mediates between God and the Virgin in depictions of the Annuciation, and is invoked by Milton as the being who “Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss”. (p. 90)

That each of the three aspects of the Christian Trinity is an equal part of a whole, specialized within its own particular locus of power but entirely dependent upon the other two for completion, is a vital concept in understanding a triadic structure of a single entity.

The Trinity Protagonist Structure

The unit of three, “The most basic and symbolic form found in nature” (Paugh, 2008, p. 5) was revered by the ancient sect of Pythagoreans as:

The first of unequals... since it is odd and cannot be divided into two equal parts. Such strength was revered by the Order, who considered three as both the divinity and soul of the world, the spirit of man, a completeness personified by the three stages of beginning, middle and end”. (Paugh, 2008, p. 6)

This most basic symbolic form resonates easily in the human psyche, and provides a ready platform from which to unfold a narrative. Bordwell and Thompson (1979) argued that within Western culture, the simplest and most dominant storytelling format is the three-act structure, in which a central protagonist engages in a plot consisting of a beginning, a middle, and an end (p. 82). Joseph Campbell’s seminal work *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949) analyzed myths and stories from dozens of different cultures and concluded that nearly every one contained the same essential primary elements. This defining structure—the “monomyth”—is often referred to as “the Hero’s journey”. For Campbell (1949), the hero is a specific entity with specific purpose:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (p. 28)

The hero, therefore, is a denizen of the natural world, a flawed being in a flawed universe. The hero sacrifices, figuratively and literally, over the course of an adventure: a series of risks, obstacles, dangers, and temptations. Physically taxed, emotionally challenged, perhaps even materially drained, the hero overcomes, confronts a great peril (externally, as in a villain, or internally, as in a personal demon or fatal character flaw), and returns home in triumph, a changed person. Vogler (1992) identified the role of the hero as:

... to give the audience a window into the story. Each person hearing a tale or watching a play or movie is invited, in the early stages of the story, to identify with the Hero, to merge with him and see the world of the story through his eyes. Storytellers do this by giving their Heroes a combination of qualities, a mix of universal and unique characteristics. (p. 40)

The hero, therefore, is the reader's conduit to the living world of the narrative. The hero is the point of identification and the locus of understanding within the storytelling structure.

Walsh (2010) further advanced the notion of the hero by introducing the "trinity protagonist structure". Instead of a single heroic entity serving as the reader's conduit, a trio of heroes fulfills this function—symbiotically linked, fundamentally dependent, yet each element specialized and with its own rhetorical and narrative purpose. Much like the triadic structure of the ancient deities, the trinity protagonist structure imbues each of the constituent elements with an equally important responsibility for maintaining the power of the whole. The triad consists of, first, the hero:

... the HERO of the story... doesn't necessarily have to be an actual "hero". Often, the term "hero" brings immediate connotations of literal heroes; selfless, noble, and altruistic men or women who "save the day" in the end. However, in this context, Hero simply means the primary male protagonist of the story and he can call upon any number of archetypes. (Walsh, 2010)

The second member of the triad is the anti-hero:

Like the Hero, the ANTI-HERO doesn't necessarily have to be a literal "anti-hero". The Anti-Hero of a Trinity is simply what the Hero is not. In his simplest form, the Anti-Hero acts as a foil to contrast and emphasize attributes of the Hero. (Walsh, 2010)

And, finally, the heroine: ... the HEROINE [is] the primary female protagonist. Like the Hero, she can be embodied by any number of archetypes (Walsh, 2010).

Note that within the trinity protagonist structure, the anti-hero and the heroine are not simply the hero's sidekicks. Each member of the trinity has specific and equally important responsibilities only he/she can fulfill. Without any one member of the triad, the entire structure falls apart—when one is removed, all are lost. Walsh (2010) presented two outstanding examples: Luke Skywalker (the Hero: good, optimistic, and brave), Han Solo (the Anti-Hero: arrogant, pessimistic, and cocky), and Leia Organa (the Heroine: strong, kind, and courageous) from the *Star Wars* (1977, 1980, 1983) trilogy, and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003, 2006, 2007) triad of Will Turner (the decent and gallant Hero), Jack Sparrow (the drunken, morally-questionable Anti-Hero), and Elizabeth Swann (the feisty and noble Heroine). Many other examples abound: *Terminator 2's* (1991) John Connor, Sarah Connor, and the Terminator, for instance, Neo, Morpheus, and Trinity in *The Matrix* (1999, 2003, 2003) series; Alan Grant, Ellie Sattler, and Ian Malcolm in *Jurassic Park* (1993).

The trinity protagonist structure can be easily confused with other narrative structures. For example, in some stories, the Hero has the main plotline.

The Anti-Hero, being a contrasting foil, inspires conflict and/or development. The Heroine allows a female perspective and sometimes acts as potential love interest to the Hero or Anti-Hero. At its simplest, this is really just a single protagonist and his supporting cast. (Walsh, 2010)

This is not a true trinity protagonist structure. In order to qualify, the Anti-Hero and the Heroine must have separate, equally important arcs of development—their own stories within the story:

In Star Wars, Han Solo changes from a selfish scoundrel to noble hero. Elizabeth Swann in *Pirates of the Caribbean* begins her story as a rather typical damsel in distress, but ends as a leader and warrior. When this happens, the story escapes being just about a hero and his helpers, but a true Trinity of protagonists, with each their own equal share in the story. (Walsh, 2010)

One of the most salient examples of the trinity protagonist structure in modern literature is that of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley. While many tend to focus on Harry Potter as the main character of the story, simply because his name happens to appear in the title, it is clear to this author that, in fact, the real protagonist of the *Potter* series is not Harry Potter, but a triadic and aspect-based single entity made up of three distinct yet wholly symbiotic parts: Hero, Anti-Hero, and Heroine. Removing any one of the three elements and the whole falls apart.

Trios, Trinities, and Triads at Potter's Core

The *Potter* verse is replete with examples, large and small, of Rowling returning again and again to the comfort and harmony of three. From the casual (The main haunt of Hogsmeade is called “The Three Broomsticks”) to the mythological (Fluffy, the three-headed dog guards the entrance to the hiding spot of the sorcerer's/philosopher's stone) to the meaningful (the love triangle among Lily Evans, James Potter, and Severus Snape lies at the very heart of the story), Rowling uses triads to underpin the series, building on the strong foundation the triangular structure provides. Consider the Tri-Wizard Tournament, around which all of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000; hereafter *GoF*) is written: Three wizards from three different wizarding schools compete in three tasks to win a fabulous prize—and when that harmonic structure is disrupted, by adding Harry to the mix, it falls apart rather quickly. When The Trio plans to invade the Department of Mysteries in *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix* (2003; hereafter *OotP*), only three members of Dumbledore's Army show up to help—Ginny Weasley, Neville Longbottom and Luna Lovegood—preserving the power of the triangular foundation. Harry's most basic and necessary support frameworks are made up of threes: First his family (Lily, James, and Harry), then the Dursleys (Vernon, Petunia, and Dudley), and then the Weasleys that, for all intents and purposes, adopt him (Arthur, Molly, Charlie, Bill, Percy, Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny—nine in all). Everywhere one looks in the *Potter* verse, powerful threes abound.

Rowling's masterful use of the triadic structure is evidenced at the very heart of the series. The entire narrative hinges upon not simply one triadic structure, but three triads positioned to form one umbrella trinity—a “supertrinity”, if you will. It is the interplay among these three triads that forms the basis for the entire *Potter* series.

In each triad, we find similar elements (and elements similar to the Christian deitic trinity): power, love, and knowledge. So, too, the supertrinity is balanced along the same lines (see Figure 1).

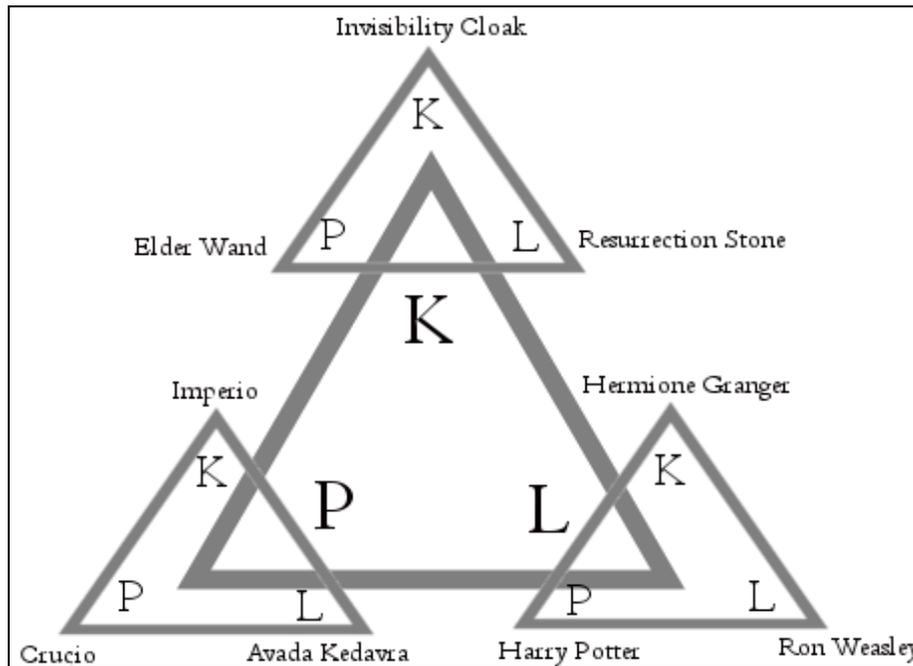


Figure 1. Interplay of triadic elements.

The Axis of Love

The Trio represents the Love axis, as clearly delineated multiple times throughout the series. The bonds of love and friendship are the main weapons of the Trio as they combat Voldemort. Dumbledore continually reminds them of this: “His gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust” (Rowling, 2003, p. 223).

In fact, it is Harry’s ability to love that positions him directly equal and opposite to Voldemort:

You are protected... by your ability to love!” said Dumbledore loudly. “The only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort’s! In spite of all the temptation you have endured, all the suffering, you remain pure of heart, just as pure as you were at the age of eleven, when you stared into a mirror that reflected your heart’s desire, and it showed you only the way to thwart Lord Voldemort, and not immortality or riches”. (Rowling, 2005, p. 510)

Within this love triad, each member occupies his/her own locus of control. Additionally, each has only moderate (and sometimes no) access to the loci of the other two. The structure of the Trio can be thought of as the classic Heart, Brain, and Body, or Mind, Body, and Spirit. Harry, representing the Power locus, is the Body of the Trio. That is, Harry Potter is the do-er of the group. He is the one who normally exercises the most agency, the highest propensity for action. From the beginning of the series, it is Harry who is called upon to perform the most difficult tasks: Harry alone confronts Professor Quirrell and Voldemort (Rowling, 1997, p. 287); Harry faces down the memory of Tom Riddle in the Chamber of Secrets (Rowling, 1999, p. 306); Harry must complete the three tasks of the Triwizard Tournament (another of Rowling’s trio of triads: three wizards from three schools performing three tasks to determine a champion; Rowling, 2000); and in the end, it is Harry who kills Voldemort (Rowling, 2007, p. 743). Yet, Severus Snape makes what may be one of the more accurate assessments of Harry Potter in the entire series: “He has fought his way out of a number of tight corners by a simple combination of

sheer luck and more talented friends. He is mediocre to the last degree” (Rowling, 2005, p. 31). Repeatedly, Harry makes poor decisions, blunders off into situations he should not be without the benefit of forethought and allows his emotions to get the best of him. This tendency culminates in the death of his godfather, Sirius Black, when Voldemort uses Harry’s own foolhardiness to trick him into a trap (Rowling, 2003).

For forethought, and for the solution to every major problem, the best spell for every major situation and for wisdom in every tight spot, Harry turns to the Brain of the Trio, Hermione Granger. Her locus is Knowledge, and without her, Harry’s Power would be simple to overcome. Although at first, the value of Hermione’s scholarly nature is overlooked (even by Hermione herself) (“I’m not as good as you”, said Harry, very embarrassed as she left go of him. “Me!” said Hermione. “Books! And cleverness. There are more important things ...” (Rowling, 1997, p. 287)), eventually, it is recognized that Hermione’s contributions are equally as important as Harry’s: “You were trying to get us out of there alive, and you were incredible. I’d be dead if you hadn’t been there to help me” (Rowling, 2007, p. 352). In fact, without Hermione Granger, Harry would have died multiple times throughout the series, and certainly would have failed at finding Voldemort’s horcruxes. It was Hermione who thought to pack all of the supplies the Trio would need for months, including clothes, a tent, a large supply of reference books and Harry’s Invisibility Cloak (Rowling, 2007). Additionally, Hermione is the only one of the three with any ability whatsoever to perform medicinal spells; during a key scene in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007; hereafter *DH*), she literally saves Ron’s life while Harry Potter fumbles around uselessly (Rowling, 2007, p. 269).

The Love locus of the Love triad is embodied by Ron Weasley, who functions as the Heart of the Trio or the Trio’s Spirit. Ron is certainly less Knowledgeable than Hermione, and not as outwardly Powerful as Harry, but Ron’s ability to Love both Harry and Hermione keeps the Trio grounded, centered and whole. Ron’s locus is actually the most important of the three. As Staume (2011) stated:

Knowledge without love will make us cold and arrogant. Without love’s ability to bring people together for mutual benefit, knowledge can become selfish and aloof... Power without love, on the other hand, will make us cruel and uncompromising. Power needs love to soften it and make it malleable.

Ron’s unshakable loyalty and willingness to sacrifice himself for his friends has been evident from the beginning of the series: Ron sacrifices his own safety, so that Harry and Hermione can advance to find the Sorcerer’s Stone (Rowling, 1997, p. 283); Ron accompanies Harry into the Forbidden Forest to find Aragog despite spiders being his greatest fear (Rowling, 1999, p. 272); it is Ron who saves Harry’s life and destroys the Locket of Slytherin even as it taunts him that no one will ever love him (Rowling, 2007, p. 371).

Although clearly both Harry and Hermione can love, and Ron and Harry are at times extremely clever, and Hermione and Ron both have day-saving moments of direct agency, none of the three possess equal measures love, knowledge, and power. Each contains vastly more of one than of the other two, and in doing so, becomes an integrally balancing part of the trinity protagonist structure.

The Axis of Power

In direct opposition to Harry, Ron, and Hermione is Tom Riddle, the darkest wizard ever to exist. Lord Voldemort—the thief of death—has his own abhorrent twist on the power/love/knowledge triad at his disposal:

the Unforgivable Curses: "... those three curses—*Avada Kedavra*, *Imperius* and *Cruciatus*—are known as the Unforgivable Curses. The use of any one of them on a fellow human being is enough to earn a life sentence in Azkaban" (Rowling, 2000, p. 217). The Unforgivable Curses represent the Power axis of the supertrinity, and, by extension, Voldemort himself. Consider that no one within the Trio, not even Harry Potter, is allowed to utilize any of the Unforgivable Curses. It is not simply that they are unable to—they have literally no access to the Curses. The one time Harry tries, he is reprimanded by Bellatrix Lestrange, Voldemort's chief lieutenant: "Never used an Unforgivable Curse before, have you, boy?" she yelled... "You need to mean them, Potter! You need to really want to cause pain—to enjoy it—righteous anger won't hurt me for long..." (Rowling, 2003, p. 810).

Each of the Unforgivable Curses grants dominion over one of the triadic loci. Power, love, and knowledge are removed and/or destroyed in turns by each of the Curses.

The *Imperius* Curse—*Imperio*—is used to exert complete control over the actions of another being. The victim has no knowledge of his/her actions ("Years back, there were a lot of witches and wizards being controlled by the *Imperius* Curse ... some job for the Ministry, trying to sort out who was being forced to act, and who was acting of their own free will" (Rowling, 2000, p. 213)); it is a curse of complete possession of the victim.

The *Cruciatus* Curse—*Crucio*—is a spell of direct pain. "Pain ... you don't need thumbscrews or knives to torture someone if you can perform the *Cruciatus* Curse" (Rowling, 2000, p. 215). Torture is an act of total power; it is the ability to enact violence without repercussion or fear of reprisal on a fellow human being. Torture is a "form of savagery and stupidity. The real aim of torture is the display of power, albeit a fictional one, through the medium of broken bodies and minds" (Iacopino, Keller, & Oksenberg, 2002). The *Cruciatus* Curse serves as the wizarding world's version of waterboarding; it is a display of power (and a display of the ability to remove one's power) reserved for use only for the most vile and warped of criminals.

Finally, the definitive Unforgivable Curse is the one that utterly destroys love and the ability to love: *Avada Kedavra*. *Avada Kedavra* is the Killing Curse, and it is "Not nice. Not pleasant. And there's no countercurse. There's no blocking it" (Rowling, 2000, p. 216). It is the decisive weapon in Voldemort's arsenal. He and his minions are willing to kill. The Trio and their allies are not.

The Axis of Knowledge

The third triadic locus in the supertrinity—the Knowledge locus—is occupied by the Deathly Hallows. Consider that the Hallows are represented by a story, and that possession of each one requires specific and detailed knowledge. In turn, each imbues the wielder with particular, discrete kinds of knowledge: Knowledge of how to cheat death, knowledge of how to avoid being seen, and knowledge of how to best defeat the enemy. These are powers neither the Trio nor Voldemort really wish to possess (for very different reasons, obviously):

... Even if [Voldemort] had known about [the Hallows], Harry, I doubt that he would have been interested in any except the first. He would not think that he needed the Cloak, and as for the Stone, whom would he want to bring back from the dead? He fears the dead. He does not love. (Rowling, 2007, p. 721)

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Hermione relates the fairy tale of *The Three Brothers*. In this tale, Death comes for three brothers, but is thwarted. Embarrassed but cunning, Death pretends to congratulate the three brothers, and offers each a gift of his own choosing (Rowling, 2007, p. 407).

The first Hallow—the Elder Wand—inhabits the power locus of the knowledge element of the supertrinity. The Elder Wand was the gift chosen by the oldest of the brothers:

... The oldest brother, who was a combative man, asked for a wand more powerful than any in existence: a wand that must always win duels for its owner, a wand worthy of a wizard who had conquered Death! So Death crossed to an elder tree on the banks of the river, fashioned a wand from a branch that hung there, and gave it to the oldest brother. (Rowling, 2007, p. 407)

The Elder Wand is an artifact of pure power, designed to defeat any wand standing against it.

The second Hallow—the Resurrection Stone—belongs to the love locus of the triad, just as Avada Kedavra does, and for the same reason. The second brother uses the Stone to return a lost love to the world:

... The second brother journeyed to his own home, where he lived alone. Here he took out the stone that had the power to recall the dead, and turned it thrice in his hand. To his amazement and his delight, the figure of the girl he had once hoped to marry, before her untimely death, appeared at once before him. (Rowling, 2007, p. 409)

The Resurrection Stone's great gift is the ability to restore love lost to death, just as Avada Kedavra's malevolent power is to destroy the ability of love through inflicting death.

Lastly, the Invisibility Cloak represents knowledge in the form of wisdom:

The youngest brother was the humblest and also the wisest of the brothers, and he did not trust Death. So he asked for something that would enable him to go forth from that place without being followed by Death. And Death, most unwillingly, handed over his own Cloak of Invisibility. (Rowling, 2007, p. 408)

The youngest brother receives his gift out of wisdom and knowledge that one can never truly cheat death, and that eventually death comes to us all. Therefore, his gift outsmarts death temporarily, and in the end, the youngest brother is the only one that meets Death on its own terms.

Conclusions

It is important to note that each locus of the supertrinity is denied the inhabitants of the other two, and each locus of the minor triads is also denied the other two. For example, one of the ways the Imperius Curse can be broken is through sheer willpower (Rowling, 2000, p. 231). The Elder Wand can kill, but the Resurrection Stone can be used to return the person to life. Harry Potter can ride a broomstick better than anyone and fight Voldemort's basilisk hand-to-hand, but requires Hermione to know a simple spell to unlock a door (Rowling, 1997, p. 160).

For this reason, love is the ultimate foil to Voldemort, precisely because it lies on the equal and opposite side of him diagrammatically. Just as the Trio cannot utilize the Unforgivable Curses and cannot truly possess the Hallows, so too is Voldemort completely denied access to love: "Lord Voldemort has never had a friend, nor do I believe he has ever wanted one" (Rowling, 2005, p. 277). In fact, Voldemort's typical response to love is to ridicule it, to try and annihilate it completely:

"Is it love again?" said Voldemort, his snake's face jeering. "Dumbledore's favorite solution, love, which he claimed conquered death, though love did not stop him falling from the tower and breaking like an old waxwork. Love, which did not prevent me from stamping out your Mudblood mother like a cockroach, Potter—and nobody seems to love you enough to run forward this time and take my curse...". (Rowling, 2007, p. 739)

Voldemort's disdain for love and his lack of ability to see its necessity is his ultimate downfall. Because Voldemort cannot love and does not possess the knowledge/wisdom to guard himself against someone he sees as so far beneath himself, his power is eventually stripped. A triangle tipped onto its point cannot stand; the balance is essential for stability. In placing all of his faith in one locus of the supertrinity, Voldemort invites his own destruction. Conversely, the ability of the Trio to complement each other, to correctly utilize the Hallows to defeat the Unforgivable Curses (and, by extension, to defeat Voldemort himself) recognizes and harnesses the full power of the balance of the supertrinity structure.

Perhaps this is why *Potter* resonates so well with audiences across cultures, in much the same way that *Star Wars* does. There is some level of human understanding that fully grasps the harmony of the triadic structure, its inherent balance, and more importantly, its intrinsic power. Tripling this triadic effect in the way Rowling has masterfully done in the *Potter* series can only further add to the stability of the internal structure of the tale. We gravitate toward this perfect harmony, once again reaffirming the trinity structure as our most primal, fundamental understanding of organizing the universe.

References

- Betz, H. D. (2007). *The Greek magical papyri in translation: Including the Demotic spells*. Chicago, I.L.: University of Chicago Press.
- Bonnefoy, Y. (1992). *Roman and European mythologies*. Chicago, I.L.: University of Chicago Press.
- Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (1979). *Film art: An introduction*. Reading, M.A.: Addison-Wesley Pub.
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. New York, N.Y.: Pantheon Books.
- Gods and goddesses, demons and spirits. (2006, March). Reshafim: Kibbutz Homepage. Retrieved from <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/religion/>
- Iacopino, V., Keller, A., & Oksenberg, D. (2002). Why torture must not be sanctioned by the United States. *The Western Journal of Medicine*, 176(3), 148-149.
- McMaster, J. (1992). The trinity archetype in the Jungle Books and the Wizard of Oz. *Children's Literature*, 20, 90-110.
- Paugh, M. (2008, April 29). The mystical nature of number according to the Pythagorean order. Retrieved from http://www.shsu.edu/~mth_jaj/math467/paugh.pdf
- Rowling, J. K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone*. New York, N.Y.: Scholastic Press.
- Rowling, J. K. (1999). *Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets*. New York, N.Y.: Arthur A. Levine Books.
- Rowling, J. K. (2000). *Harry Potter and the goblet of fire*. New York, N.Y.: A.A. Levine Books/Scholastic Press.
- Rowling, J. K. (2003). *Harry Potter and the order of the phoenix*. New York, N.Y.: Arthur A. Levine Books.
- Rowling, J. K. (2005). *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince*. New York, N.Y.: Arthur A. Levine Books.
- Rowling, J. K. (2007). *Harry Potter and the deathly hallows*. New York, N.Y.: Arthur A. Levine Books.
- Staume, D. (2011). Modern philosophy: Love, knowledge and power. Modern Philosophy: Home. Retrieved from <http://www.modernphilosophy.com/philosophy/love.html>
- Vogler, C. (1992). *The writer's journey: Mythic structures for storytellers and screenwriters*. Studio City, C.A.: M. Wiese Productions.
- Walsh, M. (2010, April 6). Trinity protagonist structure: Three core characters of a story. Retrieved from <http://www.suite101.com/content/trinity-protagonist-structure-three-core-characters-of-a-story-a220692>