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**A Flawed Father: Downplaying Fatherhood
through the Character of James Potter in *Harry Potter***

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This essay is dedicated to my dad, who showed me the power of a father's love, and to my mum, who has taught me the value of reading. I would also like to thank Constanza, Jana, Rubén, Dídac and Irene for their very valuable help and support.

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Introduction

The *Harry Potter* series has been a worldwide phenomenon, and the story of the wizard boy destined to fight the evil forces has captivated millions of readers. However, although it might seem that the classic epic themes in the books such as adventure, magic, the struggle to choose “between what is right, and what is easy” (GoF, 2000: 591), and the making of a hero are what made these novels so popular, it can be argued that *Harry Potter* is primarily a story about love, more specifically about motherly love. Lily’s role as Harry’s parent is given much more importance in the story than James’, especially when it comes to the sacrifice they made. Although both died for their son, only Lily’s sacrifice protects Harry from Voldemort in a tangible, noticeable way.

Before the analysis of the character of James Potter is attempted, an obvious but still important clarification must be made: James and Lily Potter were murdered by Lord Voldemort when their son was only one year old, and their deaths are irreversible as not even magic can bring back the dead; thus, neither the reader nor the characters in the novel who want to understand these two people are able to do so objectively, because they are only known to the reader through memories and recollections of the people who met them. There can never be a definite conclusion about Lily and James, because we only know about them through subjective memories, unlike other characters in the books, which even though they are never first person narrators, they are alive and the reader can form a more accurate opinion about them through their interactions with other characters.

In this paper, I want to explore the ways by which the author diminishes James Potter: in the first section, I will argue that she does so by making James a flawed man in contrast with Lily, and also by diminishing James’ sacrifice and making Lily’s the only one that matters, a process dealt with in the second section.

James Potter is an imperfect person, while Lily is never shown to have any flaws, meaning that whereas other characters' memories of Lily are always positive, James' actions are morally questionable. Therefore, whereas motherhood is idealized and positively represented in *Harry Potter*, fatherhood is much more complex, and sometimes negatively represented. While Harry idolizes James at first, he needs to form his own opinion about his father and accept his virtues and his flaws, a sometimes painful process; this never happens with Lily.

Lily's protection for her son came from her refusal to let Voldemort kill her son. She died trying to protect him, and that fact set a charm which prohibited Voldemort to touch him without suffering. In Dumbledore's words: "It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good" (PhS, 1997: 216). Whenever Harry faced Voldemort, he managed to survive thanks to this powerful charm. However, the only protection that James gives his son is an indirect one, a Patronus Charm that adopts the form James had when he transformed into an animal. However, Harry has to work to obtain this protection, and this is not the case in Lily's charm, which is much more powerful and works directly against Voldemort without Harry having to make any effort.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the representation of parenthood through the characters of Lily and James Potter, as James Potter seems to be less important as a parent than Lily, since his sacrifice does not protect Harry the way Lily's death does. I want to explore the complex relationship that Harry has with his father, and to compare and contrast the roles that James and Lily have in their son's life, exploring the ways in which James' identity as a father is downplayed by the author and the possible reasons why. I will argue that the processes of idealizing the mother and diminishing the father are equally damaging for men and women. I will be analyzing the texts from a Cultural Studies and Gender studies perspective.

Section 1: James Potter as a Flawed Man

Before analyzing in depth the characters of Lily and James and how they are remembered by those who knew them, it needs to be stated that when James and Lily appear after their deaths thanks to magic, they are described differently. The narrator does not describe James beyond his physical appearance, whereas Lily is a much more important figure who interacts with Harry. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, for example, Harry sees his parents for the first time in the magic mirror of Erised. His interaction with his mother comes first, and the description of her is much more prominent and dramatic:

“She was a very pretty woman. She had dark red hair and her eyes – her eyes are just like mine, Harry thought, edging a little closer to the glass. Bright green – exactly the same shape, but then he noticed that she was crying; smiling, but crying at the same time.” (PhS, 1997: 153)

Whereas the description of James is the following: “The tall, thin, black haired man standing next to her put his arms round her. He wore glasses, and his hair was very untidy. It stuck up at the back, just like Harry’s did.” (PhS, 1997: 153). His description is purely physical, as is his resemblance to Harry, and they do not interact.

The same happens when he encounters his parents at the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. When they come back, in a state between life and death thanks to the Resurrection Stone, James is described very briefly as well: “James was exactly the same height as Harry. He was wearing the clothes in which he had died, and his hair was untidy and ruffled, and his glasses were a little lopsided, like Mr. Weasley’s” (DH, 2007: 560). However, once again Lily’s description goes beyond her physique, into the emotional territory: “Lily’s smile was the widest of all. She pushed her long hair back as she drew closer to him, and her green eyes, so like his, searched his face hungrily as though she would never be able to look at him enough” (DH, 2007:

560). Harry only has eyes for her: “His eyes feasted on her, and he thought that he would like to stand and look at her forever, and that would be enough” (DH, 2007: 560).

These unbalanced depictions of Harry’s parents by the narrator are in accordance to how characters remember James and Lily, because whereas all the characters coincide in talking about Lily as a kind, loving and idealistic woman, James Potter is not portrayed as affectionately. Whereas the majority of people who knew him agree that James was a good man –almost too good, if his best friend Sirius’ descriptions are taken into consideration–, there are others who believed otherwise. His high school friends Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, as well as those others who knew and admired him, offer a version of him that omits or minimizes his questionable actions as a teenager as mere mischiefs. According to Black, James was brave: “D’you think your father and I would’ve lain down and taken orders from an old hag like Umbridge?” (OoP, 2003: 330), and Professor Minerva McGonagall refers to both James and Sirius as extremely intelligent, but mischievous: “Both very bright, of course – exceptionally bright, in fact – but I don’t think we’ve ever had such pair of troublemakers-” (PoA, 1999: 152).

Severus Snape, his high school archenemy, on the other hand, is incapable of recognizing any good qualities in him. He recalls James as arrogant, prone to breaking the rules, stupid and mean-spirited: ““Your father didn’t set much store for the rules either’ Snape went on, pressing his advantage, his thin face full of malice. ‘Rules were for lesser mortals, not Quidditch Cup-winners. His head was so swollen’” (PoA, 1999: 123). At first, not knowing Snape’s story and the reasons why he expresses this apparently irrational hate towards his father, Harry is obviously inclined to believe his father’s childhood friends rather than the cruel, unpleasant teacher who seems to hate him.

However, it is through one of Snape's memories (*OoP*, 2003: Chapter 28) that we get the nearest approach to an objective description of James in the books: a view of the past that Harry, in one of his reckless, rule-breaking episodes, sees in Snape's Pensieve¹ by mistake. Harry is very disappointed in his father: the fifteen-year-old James Potter is constantly messing up his hair, playing with a stolen snitch, showing off his Quidditch abilities, and looking at the girls beside the lake. Harry, who at the time is the exact same age as his father was in the memory, finds his father to be "a bit of an idiot" (*OoP*, 2003: 591). Moreover, not only does James behave like the "quintessential alpha male teenager" (Mortiers, 2014: 21), but he also bullies Snape, who did not provoke him in any way, merely because Sirius said he was bored. In Mortiers' words: "James and his gang not only had a habit of breaking the school rules, but they also liked to laugh at and bully the social outcasts, Severus Snape in particular." (Mortiers, 2014: 21). Harry had only known the good side of his father, which they both seem to share, this "habit of breaking the school rules" as they are both adventurous and brave; but Harry himself states his disgust towards his father's actions and it is clear that he would never do such a thing, because after all, he himself had been bullied. This episode sets Harry on an existential crisis: his father was what Snape said he was. In the memory, he did not look brave or loyal but indeed arrogant, stupid and mean-spirited. Harry is consequently very conflicted about his feelings towards his father, which had always been of admiration, as he recalls: "For nearly five years the thought of his father had been a source of comfort, of inspiration. Whenever someone had told him he was like James, he had glowed with pride inside... and now... now he felt cold and miserable at the thought of him." (*OoP*, 2003: 576, original ellipses).

¹ A Pensieve is a magic instrument, similar to a large plate, which allows the wizard or witch to retrieve memories in his mind and store them in there in case he or she wants to examine them in detail. Anybody can access to another person's Pensieve, although that is obviously considered an intrusion.

There is no reason why James should be a bully. If we analyze the causes for somebody to be a bully, we often find that this person is unhappy in his or her life and targets people who seem to have what they lack. Typically, bullies are not happy at home; their parents are going through a divorce, they feel insecure, or they have been bullied themselves (Sanjuán, 2015: documentary). Yet that is not James' case: there is no evidence that he was an unhappy child, as he came from a wealthy and loving family, he had friends, and he was popular and well liked. Snape was not a Death Eater back then, so there is no possible justification for James' actions. The only possible justification to James' actions is stated by Rowling in an interview: "James always suspected Snape harboured deeper feelings for Lily, which was a factor in James' behavior to Snape" (In Bloomsbury.com, 2007: website). Nevertheless, this is extradiegetic to the text, as there is no evidence of that in the novels, and therefore, this statement should be treated as a subjective interpretation of James' character.

Why did Rowling make James a bully, then? It seems that her sole purpose is to show Harry that he had a flawed father. Sirius' recklessness can be justified by his years in Azkaban, Snape's character comes from a troubled infancy, but justifying James' actions as "youth idiocy" seems a very weak argument, as Sirius' says: "'Look,' he said, 'your father was the best friend I ever had and he was a good person. A lot of people are idiots at the age of fifteen. He grew out of it,'" (OoP, 2003: 592).

James' behaviour causes a "profound confusion" in Harry, who thought his father was much more like him, as they have this "innate proneness to misbehaviour" in common (Mortiers, 2014: 21). However, he never worries that he is in danger of becoming a bully himself, as it is clear that he, like Lily Potter, is above this kind of behavior, and he completely rejects and condemns his father's actions, just as his mother did. Much to Harry's relief: "His mother had been decent" (OoP, 2003: 576).

The contrast between James and Lily could not be more acute, and it appears clearly in Lily's speech, when she confronts him:

“Messing up your hair because you think it looks cool to look like you've just got off your broomstick, showing off with that stupid Snitch, walking down corridors and hexing anyone who annoys you just because you can – I'm surprised your broomstick can get off the ground with that fat head on it. You make me SICK” (OoP, 2003: 571)

In all memories about Lily, nobody ever questions her morals. She appears to have no defects and she is a good person, very much like Harry who, despite his anger and irrational behavior in some periods of his life, is the embodiment of goodness. This can be seen very clearly in his attitude in times of war, for he never made an attempt to kill anybody and he ultimately urges Voldemort to repent so he can be forgiven. Also, his ability to love is his ultimate weapon against Voldemort. Harry has to come to terms with the actions of his father and stop idealizing him, and yet that does not happen with Lily. Only Petunia, Lily's sister, speaks badly of her: “I was the only one who saw her for what she was – a freak! But for my mother and father oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in the family!” (PhS, 1997: 44). However, we know that these comments come from a jealous sister, and the fact that Petunia is cruel to Harry only discredits her and reinforces Lily's goodness.

Lily's higher moral standards can be clearly seen in her influence on James Potter, as she only agrees to start a relationship with him once he matures. She also had a good influence on Severus Snape, because although she ultimately distanced herself from him when it became clearer that he supported Voldemort, it seems that his love for her is his only good quality. Harry inherits her “goodness” and her pure heart; morality is the difference between Lily and James, because although James always “hated the Dark Arts” (OoP, 2003: 590), he also had his own shadows. In fact, Lily's rejection towards James' actions offers comfort to Harry, and it could be argued that Lily helps her son forgive his father. In Mortier's words: “It is only because of his deep respect for

his mother's sacrifice, that Harry will be prepared to overlook his father's disquieting macho behaviour toward Snape.” (Mortiers, 2014: 21)

As we have seen, there is a systematic diminishing of James, both as a father figure and as a man, whereas Lily, on the other hand, is glorified in her role of mother and as an individual, as she possesses higher morals than anybody. McMahon-Coleman and Weaver put Lily Potter in their category of the Mother as “Lioness”, as this type of mother is “a protector and defender of children, even to the point of death” (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver, 2012: 151), and they state that Lily is the “epitome of motherhood”. However, James sacrificed himself for his son as well, and yet he is not considered the epitome of fatherhood.

As it has been argued, not only was Lily the perfect mother, but she was also a perfect woman. This type of “flawless woman” falls into what Douglas and Michaels call “The Mommy Myth”, defined as a new wave of idealization of motherhood that occurred after the World War II when women, after having been called into the workforce, had to “go back to the kitchen” (Douglas and Michaels, 2005: 2). This “new mommism” is defined by “unattainable images of infinite patience and constant adoration” (Douglas and Michaels, 2005: 2). It bears striking resemblances to “The Angel in the House” myth of how a perfect Victorian woman should be, taken from the poem by Coventry Patmore. This poem depicted the paradigm of a Victorian woman, selfless and angelical, eager to essentially be a servant: “Man must be pleased; but him to please/ Is woman's pleasure” (Patmore, 1854).

According to McMahon-Coleman and Weaver, Lily is the best mother in the entire series: “In self-sacrifice, and in moral influence, Lily remains the standard of motherhood against which all other maternal figures in the series are measured” (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver, 2012: 152). Moreover, she is also brave and

idealistic, a standard of moral highness and the reason why the men in her life try to be better. It can be argued that Lily is the modern version of “The Angel in the House”, as she does not find “pleasure” in pleasing men, but men seem to want to please her. She is the ideal woman of the twenty first century, a perfect balance of mother, wife, and advocate for social justice. She is idealized by everybody to the point of becoming an unrealistic character. This idealization occurs through the mystification of Lily Potter, both as a mother and as a woman, and at the expense of James Potter as a father and as a man.

James’ complexity is understandable and expected from any well-rounded character, and makes him a strong literary character; on the other hand, in contrast with almost all the rest of Rowling’s characters, who in general are complex and well constructed, Lily does not have a known “dark side”. Whether Lily’s extreme perfection and James’ flaws were intentional or not, Lily is, without question, a better person than James. In fact, she is a better person than anybody else in the books. By making Lily so perfect and James unquestionably flawed, motherhood is placed at a higher level than fatherhood, as the parent is never questioned by Harry and remains in its initial pedestal. However, it is worth noting that at the same time motherhood becomes a simpler, shallower concept with no room for development, as Harry evolves as a character when faced with the memory of his father, not his mother.

Section 2: The Importance of Lily’s Sacrifice over James’: The Protective Charm and the Patronus

When James and Lily Potter died, his son was saved from Lord Voldemort because his mother had sacrificed herself for Harry. Since then, this protection, this

charm that is in Harry's blood, has protected him from Voldemort multiple times and is his ultimate weapon against him. According to Dumbledore:

“Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection for ever. It is in your very skin. (PhS, 1997: 312)

This statement, if we consider James' point of view, who also died for his family, is very disturbing as it suggests that he did not love his son as deeply as Lily did, or that his love and sacrifice are not as valuable, and that motherhood is intrinsically more important than fatherhood. Be this as it may, James offers Harry another type of protection, his Patronus, which will be discussed and compared to Lily's protection in this section.

One of the most significant magical charms that appear in the Harry Potter novels is the Patronus, which is both the name of a spell and its outcome. A wizard or witch can perform a Patronus Charm when attacked by Dementors, harmful dark creatures which feed on people's happy thoughts, leaving them with only sadness. They are the guardians of Azkaban, a prison for wizards, and they are used by the Ministry of Magic as executioners, since they can absorb somebody's soul. If done correctly, the form of a Patronus is that of a protective animal, made of glowing smoke, which will emerge from the wand and defend the wizard against these creatures. Only a very powerful wizard or witch is able to summon their corporeal Patronus, and in order for the spell to work, the wizard or witch has to concentrate on a very happy memory. They cannot communicate anything, since they are not alive *per se*, but they are merely a source of protection and positive energy. They can be related to totemic animals. A totem is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “A natural object or animal that is believed by a particular society to have spiritual significance and that is adopted by it as an emblem.” In Dillon's words, “To understand totemic animals, the metaphor is crucial”

(Dillon, 2008: 74). We cannot understand totemic animals as literal animals, but rather, like Patronuses and Daemons in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, a sort of energy or symbolic creature that exercises a positive protection over the human.

Even though the relationship between the wizard and the Patronus is individual and exclusive (each wizard has their own Patronus, and members of the same family have different ones), the Patronuses can be a symbol of somebody the wizard loves (as it is in Snape and Nymphadora Tonks' case); in Harry's case, his Patronus is related to his father. James' Patronus was a stag, and he, as an animagus (a wizard who can transform into an animal), adopts this form; Harry's Patronus is a stag as well. In this case, there is a relationship between family, love, and Patronuses. Harry's Patronus is therefore the link between father and son. Harry's Patronus acts as an extension of James Potter's protection after death, a kind of mark he leaves in Harry, similar to his scar. James' presence in Harry amounts to more than their similar appearance and character (their inclination to break the rules, their ability in Quidditch, their loyalty towards their friends, etcetera). It could be argued that their Patronuses are the same animal because of the love bond that unites them, but also because of their similar souls and personalities. The Patronus' bond is exclusively James and Harry's, and as Dumbledore says:

“You think the dead we have loved ever truly leave us? You think we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him. How else could you produce that *particular* Patronus? Prongs rode again last night.” (*PoA*, 1999: 312)

However, James' imprint on Harry is unlike the protection that saved him from Voldemort, which is in his blood and is the product of his mother's sacrifice. James sacrificed himself for his family, but that does not appear to have any protective consequence for them. McMahon-Coleman and Weaver's description of Lily is in accordance to the general tone of the novels:

“Lily is her son’s savior. [...] [She] returns to Harry when he is threatened by Dementors; he hears her voice from the past. [...] And when Voldemort tries to kill him again at the end of HPGoF, the spirit of his mother comes from her killer’s wand. It is she who gives him the instructions that save his life”. (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver, 2012: 151 – 152)

Nevertheless, James appears from Voldemort’s wand as well, his spirit helps Harry as well, and he even plays a more active role in Harry’s protection from Dementors. More importantly, he also sacrificed himself, dying to save his family even though he faced Voldemort unarmed and there was no hope of survival. It is obvious that having been given the choice, as Lily did (Voldemort asked Lily to step aside, but he did not do so with James), he would have died as well, and therefore their sacrifices are equal, but they do not have the same value.

James’ protection is not passive on Harry’s part as is Lily’s “blood”, but active, meaning Harry has to learn to conjure the Patronus. It can be argued that the stag is not only a source of protection and James’ imprint, but also the willingness of Harry to grow up and actively protect himself. Harry conjures the Stag for the first time because he believes he has seen his father coming to the rescue, when it is in fact himself²:

‘Come on!’ he muttered, staring about. ‘Where are you? Dad, come on’. But no one came. Harry raised his head to look at the circle of Dementors across the lake. One of them was lowering its Hood. It was time for the rescuer to appear – but no one was coming to help this time – and then it hit him – he understood. He hadn’t seen his father – he had seen himself – Harry flung himself out from behind the bush and pulled out his wand, ‘EXPECTO PATRONUM!’ he yelled. (*PoA*, 1999: 300)

When his father does not come to protect him, Harry has to conjure the Patronus on his own means. His father does not have the ability to protect his son, unlike Lily, so Harry has to do it by himself, and in that way, he is able to adopt part of his father’s identity. Dumbledore offers a precise explanation for this: ‘So you did see your father last night, Harry... you found him inside yourself.’ (*PoA*, 1999: 312).

² By means of a Time-Turner, a magical artifact that makes it possible for anyone to travel in time, Harry goes back in time to where he previously was under the attack of Dementors. He thought he had seen his father conjure a Patronus, but it was in fact Harry himself, from the future.

There is a clear parallelism between Lily's protective charm (her sacrifice), and Harry's Patronus. They are both his parents' more evident "imprints" on him, and even though they left no visible mark, their true power is inside Harry and comes from the love his parents had for him. They both help to protect him, but in different ways: Lily's charm acts automatically when Harry is in danger, but the Patronus, even though it has his father's form and reminds Harry of James, has to be conjured by Harry, and learning how to conjure a Patronus is very difficult. Thus, James and Lily's protective roles fall into the stereotypical roles of women and men who are also parents: motherhood is much more prominent (loving, caring, protecting, staying close to the son), and also much more powerful, whereas fathers are distant, they are there to "toughen up" their sons and to help them "become a man". That is why Harry has to suffer to actively conjure a Patronus, but he does not need to do anything to benefit from Lily's sacrifice, which is given to him. The father is much more absent, which is very stereotypical, as it will be discussed later on. Indeed, Heilman and Donaldson describe the Harry Potter books as "ideologically conservative" (Heilman and Donaldson, 2009: 141), and state that: "In the Potter books, character types and the hierarchies of class, culture and gender are very much the same as those in other popular books and movies and in real life situations." (Heilman and Donaldson, 2009: 140-141)

Even in the night were they both died for their son, their deaths are described very differently by Voldemort: "I killed your father first and he put up a courageous fight... but your mother needn't have died... she was trying to protect you" (PhS, 1997: 213). Even though in the end Voldemort killed Lily in spite of the promise he made not to do so, this quote suggests several things: Did James "need to have died"? Was his duty as a man to fight and die for his family? What would have happened if Lily had encountered Voldemort first and James had stayed with Harry? It also seems that Voldemort was

surprised that Lily had to die as well, or that she would not actively fight to protect Harry. It suggests also that James' role was that of a fighter, whereas Lily's role was that of a protector, and if it has been suggested that James' role was to fight and Lily's was to protect, Harry's reaction to their deaths has to be in accordance to that. According to Dumbledore, Harry must feel differently about his parents' deaths, as he must desire to avenge his father, but his mother's death provides an impenetrable protection: "If Voldemort had never murdered your father, would he have imparted in you a furious desire for revenge? Of course not! If he had not forced your mother to die for you, would he have given you a magical protection he could not penetrate? Of course not, Harry!" (OoP, 2013: 477)

These parental roles in Rowling's story are rather traditional; her treatment of parenthood reminds one of Freud's idea of the relationship between mother and child and father and child, the former being far more important. In his "Interpretation of Dreams", Freud explains his famous theory of the Oedipus Complex: "It is the fate of all of us [men], perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so." (Freud, 1913: 74). This is to be taken metaphorically, of course. Freud was not condoning literal incest and murder. However, it is true that Harry never questions his mother in any way, and that he has a much more troubled relationship with James, full of doubts, insecurities and questions about him; he has to reconcile himself with him. Freud also believed that fathers did not play an important role in the child's development. In Parke's words:

Freud believed that the infant's relationship with its mother significantly shaped its later personality and social relationships. Fathers were virtually ignored. [...] Fathers did have a place in Freud's theory of development, but not until a later period in childhood. However, many subsequent follower of Freud accepted his emphasis on the importance of infancy for later development and thereby perpetuated his belief that the mother was the primary socializing agent. (Parke, 1996: 6)

Rowling's treatment of motherhood versus fatherhood follows this current of thought: the mother is intrinsically more important than the father for a son. The embodiment of this view is the kind of protection that Harry's parents are able to give to their son: the fact that Harry has to learn to produce a Patronus indicates that James is practically powerless when it comes to offer protection to Harry in comparison to Lily. Besides, Patronuses do not automatically adopt the wizard's father form, meaning that it is not intrinsically a protection related to fathers, whereas Lily's protection can only come from a *mother* to his child, as it is seen by the fact that James died for his son but his sacrifice did not protect his wife or Harry. Thus, we can conclude that James, merely because of his condition as a father, can only offer a vague, distant protection that his son has to work for to obtain, whereas Lily, by being the mother, gives her son a very powerful, strong protection from which Harry benefits before he even knows that it exists. Lily's protection is even extends to her family, making it impossible for Voldemort to attack Harry while he is living under her aunt Petunia's roof.

In conclusion, the author made the mother's sacrifice valuable and not the father's, and the protection that the mother gives the son is much more beneficial for Harry than what James is able to provide for him. By making the mother the primary protector of the child, Rowling falls into a cultural stereotype which has been perpetuated for centuries, that of mothers having a more relevant role in their children's life. Nevertheless, there is no scientific evidence that this stereotype is true. In Dowd's words: "The attributes of good parenting are more associated with mothering, but the connections are cultural, not biological" (Dowd, 2000: 9). However, although the traditional stereotypes remain fixed, James' complexity triggers in Harry a series of processes that contribute to the shaping of his personality. Therefore, the protection that

James gives comes also in a more complex and developed form, such as hard work and personal development, which in the end culminates in a Patronus.

Conclusion

In this essay I have stated that fatherhood has a less important role in the series than motherhood, and I have explored the ways in which the author downplays fatherhood. We have seen that by making Lily as a better person than James, who was a bully during his teenage years, Rowling idolizes the mother and places her in a more important role. Moreover, even though both Lily and James sacrifice themselves, only Lily's actions protect her son, and by making Lily's sacrifice count and not James', motherhood is also made more relevant than fatherhood.

There is not an obvious reason for this downplaying of fatherhood. However, if we look at the author's biography, we will find troubled relationships with men, both with her father and with her first husband. Rowling admitted in an interview with Oprah Winfrey that she would never "make peace" with her father, with whom she has a complicated relationship, and in regards to her first husband, she stated that: "I repeated patterns from my first family in my selection of my first husband" (in Winfrey 2010). At the same time, her mother died of multiple sclerosis when she was a teenager, and she said that: "The [Harry Potter] books wouldn't be what they are if she hadn't died" (in Winfrey 2010). In her life, men and especially fathers (her first husband left her to be a single mother, in poverty and clinically depressed) were disappointing, whereas her mother was not. There might be some references of her personal life in the books, but nevertheless, this argument seems poor and cannot be the sole reason for it. It might be that she consciously made mothers better than fathers, but in my opinion, this might not have been a voluntary message from the author, but rather an unconscious act, the

product of the cultural acceptance that mothers are indeed more important in a child's life than fathers. According to Dowd: "We know far less about fathers than we do about mothers. We tend to count fathers less, notice them less, and understand less about the correlations between fatherhood and child care" (Dowd, 2000: 2). She continues to explain that this attitude towards fathers is result of the assumptions made in regards of parental roles by society; we still see fathers as providers and mothers as caretakers, and it is clear that Rowling has not questioned that assumption, but rather reinforced it. It is important to note misrepresentations and hegemonic and dominant conceptions of gender, especially in a series of novels so popular amongst children, as "gender representations, like other forms of cultural ideology, both obscure and justify oppressive practices" (Heilmann and Donaldson, 2009: 140). As long as these stereotypes are perpetuated, society will not be equal. Men like James will not get credit as fathers, and women will be pressured to be perfect mothers like Lily. It is worth noting that this is not the only harmful stereotype in the novels. For instance, the protagonist and the villain are men, and most positions of power in the political and academic world in *Harry Potter* are filled by men (Heilman and Donaldson, 2009), whereas most women in the novels are or become mothers.

Finally, in spite of the complicated relationship that Harry has had with his father, he develops thanks to him. His personality changes and his view of the world does too: he is able to understand Snape's motivations better, and he questions many things he had taken for granted. Ultimately, he forgives James, which allows him to become a better father himself, as his last appearance as a caring father in the epilogue of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* shows. Moreover, he clearly believes that James' sacrifice counted as well, and he names his children after both of his parents

(DH, 2007: Epilogue). When he is faced with the graves of James and Lily, Harry sees them as his parents, and as equals:

“But they were not living, thought Harry: they were gone. The empty words could not disguise the fact that his parents’ moldering remains lay beneath snow and stone, indifferent, unknowing. [He looked down] at the thick snow hiding from his eyes the place where the last of Lily and James lay, bones now, surely, or dust, not knowing or caring that their living son stood so near, his heart still beating, alive because of their sacrifice and closest o wishing, at this moment, that he was sleeping under the snow with them” (DH, 2007: 269)

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