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Camí González, Jordi; Sánchez Campos, Noelia, dir. The Challenges of Continuity in a Transmedia Franchise : the Issue of Canonicity in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Cursed Child. 2021. 32 pag. (1482 Grau en Estudis Anglesos 801 Grau en Estudis Anglesos)

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**The Challenges of Continuity in a Transmedia
Franchise: The Issue of Canonicity in J.K. Rowling's**
Harry Potter and the Cursed Child

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

Author: Jordi Camí González

Supervisor: Noelia Sánchez Campos

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística

Grau d'Estudis Anglesos

June 2021

CONTENTS

0. Introduction.....	1
0.1. Introduction.....	1
0.2. Literature review.....	3
1. What is canon?	7
1.1. What is canon in Harry Potter	8
1.2. Authorship and <i>The Cursed Child</i>	10
2. <i>The Cursed Child</i> and the unknown author	12
2.1. J.K. Rowling and authorized fanfiction.	12
2.2. <i>The Cursed Child</i> and the inconsistencies.....	14
3. Conclusions and Further Research	20
Works Cited.....	23

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Professor Noelia Sánchez Campos for her support and guidance. Secondly, my parents for supporting me all the way through the four years of the degree. I would also like to thank my UAB friends for helping me whenever I have needed it. Finally, special thanks should be given to Bárbara for believing in me and encouraging me to resume my studies many years later after having quitted Batxillerat.

Abstract

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child is a play directed by Jack Thorne based on an original story by J.K. Rowling, John Tiffany and Jack Thorne. The play, which originally premiered in London on the 30th of July of 2016, has been awarded in multiple occasions for its West End and Broadway productions. Despite that, the reception of the play on the side of the critics and the fans was mixed. While some viewed the play as a masterpiece mainly due to its never-seen-before visual effects onstage, those who paid attention to the plot were considerably dissatisfied with the final product. Furthermore, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* was released as a script-book the day after the play premiered. Ever since, it has been regarded as the 8th story and, also, as part of the original canon. However, both the critics and the fandom cannot seem to agree.

This dissertation will mainly address the issue of canonicity by focusing on the challenges that *The Cursed Child* entails for the Harry Potter's franchise continuity. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the plot will be carried out in order to gather evidence of inconsistencies that can be traced back to the original novels and within *The Cursed Child*'s plot in order to support the claim that *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* should not be considered canon. Additionally, the issue of authorship and the fact that the Harry Potter franchise has been expanded into a transmedia storytelling phenomenon will also be accounted for.

Keywords: *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, J.K. Rowling, canonicity, transmedia, literary continuity, authorship, fanfiction.

0. Introduction

0.1. Introduction

British Joanne Kathleen Rowling is the author of *Harry Potter*, one of the world's most famous saga. The first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was published in June 1997, whereas the last one, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, was published ten years later, in July 2007. Apart from the seven novels that the saga is made of and which constitute the original canon, Rowling has also published three companion books for charitable purposes; *Quidditch Through the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* in March 2001, and *The Tales of Beddle the Bard* in December 2008.

Due to the enormous success, the novels were adapted into a series of films. Although the written series was completed by 2007, fans continued to have their Harry Potter dose up until 2011 when the last movie premiered. A year later, the Pottermore website –later on rebranded as WizardingWorld– was released. The site offers unreleased Rowling's texts that expand and enrich the Harry Potter world.

After four years with no news about new Harry Potter material –other than the complementary Pottermore texts–, the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (henceforth *The Cursed Child*) premiered at the Palace Theatre of London in July 2016. As it can be read in the cover of the printed version of the script, the play is based on an original story by J.K. Rowling, John Tiffany and Jack Thorne. Apart from directing and contributing to the writing of the story, Tiffany is also the director of the play. Before directing *The Cursed Child*, Tiffany had also directed other plays such as *Once* (2011) and *The Glass Managerie* (2013). Moreover, Thorne, who is also credited as playwright, is responsible for the scripts of *Let the Right One In* (2013), *Hope* (2014), and *The Solid Life of Sugar Water* (2015).

The play, which was advertised as the eighth story in the series, won several awards, including nine Laurence Olivier Awards. As a result of its immense success the production was brought to New York, San Francisco and Melbourne and will premier in Hamburg and Toronto by the end of 2021 and in Japan in the summer of 2022. Furthermore, in order to make *The Cursed Child* available to fans worldwide, a printed version of the script was published the day after its world premiere. Despite its major success, the play's critical reception had contrasted responses. While some enjoyed the play, others thought that *The Cursed Child* was nothing like the original Harry Potter material and felt disappointed at a story that challenged previously established rules of the Potterworld. Furthermore, the fact that the story was developed by Rowling, Tiffany and Thorne, has caused fans and scholars to doubt Rowling's actual involvement in the making of the story.

The first time I read *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* I did it as a fan, that is, in a non-professional way as I was not even thinking about studying a degree in English Studies. After reading the play, I decided not to consider the play as canon and to regard it as a work of fiction not directly connected to the original saga. A year later, I got into the English Studies degree and I decided I wanted my BA dissertation to be about canonicity and authorship issues in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. As Borojević states, “what the books (...) of Harry Potter have provided are a forum for discussion among children growing up in the 1990s and early 2000s, many of whom have now become scholars themselves” (231). Although I would not consider myself a scholar, by working on this end-of-degree dissertation, I have the chance to merge both the fan and the academic spheres. Doing research on canonicity and authorship and trying to shed light on how to regard *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is relevant in order to make sense of the transmedia Harry Potter franchise.

My provisional thesis statement is that *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, which is said to be the eighth story in the series and therefore to belong to the Harry Potter canon, should not be considered as such due to the plot inconsistencies that challenge the continuity of the original saga. Moreover, these inconsistencies might derive from Rowling not being an actual writer of the story. My research question, then, is to what extent the unknown authorship and the inconsistencies that can be found all over the script play a determining role in not regarding *The Cursed Child* as canon. To provide an answer to my research question my methodology consists in a close reading of the printed version of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and a thorough analysis of critical material on canonicity.

To that end, this dissertation will be organised in two main sections. The first part will deal with canonicity. First, I will provide a definition of *canon* and I will try to categorize the various materials that the Harry Potter franchise is composed of in different levels of canonicity. After that, I will introduce the topic of authorship connected to canonicity; that is, I will discuss whether it is sufficient for the author to grant canon status to a given work for the fans to consider it as such. Finally, in the second part, I will discuss the implications of Rowling not being involved in the writing of the story. After that, I will finish by providing evidence about why *The Cursed Child* should not be considered as part of the canon based on inconsistencies with the original saga and with *The Cursed Child* itself.

0.2. Literature review

Harry Potter, written by British author Joanne Kathleen Rowling, is one of the greatest literary sagas of recent times. The Harry Potter novels are catalogued as young adult literature and thus they are often not taken as seriously as other types of literature.

Despite that, its massive popularity has drawn attention from scholars of various fields such as politics and law, religion, psychology and literature.

Starting with politics and law, Bethany Barrat published *The Politics of Harry Potter* (2012). In this, Barrat, introduces the readers to concepts that are present in the novel such as human rights or terrorism. In addition, *The Law and Harry Potter* (2010), edited by Thomas and Snyder, takes into consideration law and legal institutions in Rowling's novels.

Harry Potter has also been studied from a religious point of view. In the article *Religion in Harry Potter: Do J.K Rowling's Novels Promote Religion or Undermine it?* (2011) Ari Armstrong concludes that Rowling portrays significant Christian elements such as immortality, which is an essential theme in the novels. Peter Ciaccio "compares the morals presented in the series with traditional Christian ones" (34) in his chapter *Harry Potter and Christian Theology* (2008).

Regarding philosophy and literature, Bagget, Klein and Irwin edited *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts* (2004), a collection of essays that connect philosophy to the world of Harry Potter. In addition, Irwin is also the editor of *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles* (2010) together with Gregory Bassham. Additionally, James M. Okapal changes the attention from the Harry Potter novels to the films in his essay *Harry Potter as Philosophy: Five Types of Friendship* included in *The Palgrave Handbook of Popular Culture as Philosophy* (2020). Okapal suggests that the Harry Potter films offer five types of friendship instead of the three that Aristotle's theory accounted for.

Unfortunately, the main topic of this dissertation, canonicity –in relation to continuity and authorship in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, has been barely investigated by the critical community. However, these have been studied in isolation or

in relation to other works and authors which, nevertheless, can be extrapolated to Rowling's *Harry Potter*.

Canonicity is an element that has been discussed primarily in relation to The Holy Bible since some texts are considered canon and others might not be widely accepted as such. Carver tries to answer the question of *The Cursed Child*'s canon by analyzing *The Cursed Child* as biblical texts are analyzed, that is, by means of four dimensions: "historical, textual, ritual, and inspiration" (155). Although she does not provide a clear answer to this matter, she raises some relevant questions. For example, whether a text can be broken down into smaller pieces and mark, for instance, a date as not canon instead of discrediting the entire work (153). According to Grødahl, "the concept of fans ignoring a portion of canon is not unprecedented" (22). Apparently, fans who write fanfiction are disregarding the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*' epilogue as they do not consider it canon (64). What scholars and fans seem to agree on is that there is not just one canon in Harry Potter but many (Grødahl, 64; Carver 153, Clark, 91). Carver also wonders whether the first work to be published is more important than what is published next or whether the latest work to be published is more relevant for being a corrected version of the previous work (156).

DerkSEN and Hick have studied canon in relation to Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*, a literary phenomenon whose adventures were also developed outside the books. According to these critics, there is a "standardly accepted Sherlock Holmes canon (that) consists of (...) fifty-six short stories and four novels, all written by Doyle" (DerkSEN and Hick). However, two Holmes parodies written by Doyle and other works written by Doyle's son are excluded from it. For this reason, DerkSEN and Hick also discuss to what extent authorship plays a role in concluding what is canon and what is not.

In *Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2008,) Henry Jenkins describes how well-formed trasmedia storytelling should be carried out: “a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels and comics (and) its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction” (96). As Brummitt (2016) asserts, “these franchise developments demonstrate a willingness on the part of Potter creatives to depart from dominant narratives and iconographies.” (113). Hence, transmedia storytelling expands and enriches such universe. However, a transmedia work might encounter difficulties to engage with part of the public as keeping track of newly published material might only be easily accessible to those who actively look for more. For example, Scolari, who also discusses transmedia storytelling, claimed that “the official story of Harry Potter—the canon—is over” (71). This statement is somehow problematic. By the time Scolari’s article was published, the Wizarding World webpage –previously known as Pottermore— was already functioning. In this, Rowling extended –and continues to do so— the *Potterverse* with short stories and anecdotes that are considered canon.

In this dissertation, apart from discussing the consequences of the expanding Harry Potter universe, the role of Rowling in the development of *The Cursed Child* is also going to be debated. As Brummitt asserts “*the Cursed Child* is an interesting production because Rowling is involved in ways that are difficult to pin down” (126). Nevertheless, whether Rowling has really participated in the writing of *The Cursed Child* or not is something that it is probably never going to be known.

Another central element in *The Cursed Child* that brings discordance to the discussion is the reintroduction of Time-Turners. In her essay *Time Travel and the Cursed Child* (2018), Clark compares how time travel has been employed in both literature and popular culture and, particularly, its effects on *The Cursed Child* (91).

After examining the selected literature, I conclude that providing an elaborate description of what is canon in the Harry Potter world is hardly possible. Additionally, the bigger the franchise to be analysed is the more difficult it is to agree on what is canon. The problem increases when the franchise expands in different directions. Moreover, authorship seems to play a key role in determining what is canon and what is not –considering that there is just one level of canonicity.

1. What is canon?

The word *canon* is the term that it is commonly employed in literature to refer to the “collection of classic literary texts that are distinguished by overall literary quality, lasting significance, and a distinctive style that is worthy of study” (Cole, 2008, quoted in Rybakova and Roccanti, 32). However, in this dissertation, *canon* will be used to refer to the “material accepted as making up part of a particular fiction, especially a story stretching over more than one work” (Derksen and Hick, online). To this definition I would add the transmedia factor, since newer stories –either prequels or sequels– might be told by means of other platforms. In the case of *Harry Potter*, although the original material consisted of seven novels, *The Cursed Child*, was delivered in the form of both a play and a printed script. Likewise, the ongoing prequel *Fantastic Beasts* will consist of five movies of which a printed version of the screenplay will also be made available. That both productions count with printed versions of their scripts and the fact that they have been developed in diverse platforms is, precisely, what makes them troublesome to classify as canon.

In fiction, the discussion about what is and what is not canon was first approached in relation to Doyle’s universally known character Sherlock Holmes.

Although the character's stories have been adapted into movies and television series, "Sherlock Holmes canon consists of (...) fifty-six short stories and four novels, all written by Doyle" (Derksen and Hick). In the last few years, other franchises such as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and Marvel with its *MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe)* have intensified the discussion on canon.

1.1. What is canon in Harry Potter

Although Harry Potter was primarily a series of seven books, the expanding franchise that has been created around it has been diversified across distinct platforms. As stated earlier, the Harry Potter brand counts with film adaptations of the original heptalogy, supplementary textbooks, the ongoing film prequels *Fantastic Beasts*, the official website WizardingWorld.com where Rowling herself adds supplementary texts, theme parks, games of all types, and finally, the topic of discussion of this BA dissertation, the sequel in the form of a play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. Given that the works that make up this franchise have been developed for different media, rather than a binary decision on whether or not a particular item is considered canon, classifying them according to their degree of canonicity would be the most appropriate.

For example, VanderArk has in his website, The Harry Potter Lexicon¹, a section named *The Harry Potter Canon* in which he classifies the Harry Potter material in three levels of canon. For VanderArk, only the Bloomsbury editions of the original novels are regarded as primary canon. Furthermore, other Harry Potter books written by Rowling such as *Quidditch Through the Ages* or *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them*, other English-language editions of the original novels, the *Fantastic Beasts* screenplays and other writings by Rowling such as the ones included in the

¹ The Harry Potter Lexicon is an unofficial Harry Potter fansite that has been working as an encyclopedia for almost twenty years.

WizardingWorld website are regarded as secondary canon. Interestingly enough, VanderArk considers other non-Bloomsbury English editions of the novels as secondary canon but he does not mention the translations. Finally, he considers tertiary canon other materials that are considered canon as long as they do not enter into conflict with other material with a higher level of canonicity. This includes transcripts of Rowling's interviews and the *The Cursed Child*. Also, although author Elizabeth M. Clark does not attempt to classify all the available materials, she regards *The Cursed Child* as a “text (that) is worth studying as part of the Potter phenomenon (...) but further from canon than the original books” (91). In addition, Grødahl also notes that “among fans, there are already multiple levels of canonicity” (64)

Despite the fact that classifying the Harry Potter works according to their level of canonicity is quite widespread, both the critic and the fan communities do not seem to agree on where to place each item. For this reason, I will proceed to explain where I would place each item and why.

The seven Harry Potter books would constitute the official canon. Regarding their film adaptations, I would not consider them as primary nor secondary canon but as parallel canon because, as Clark claims, the films “form the foundational story for many fans” (91). That is, to many fans, the films constitute their base on the Potter world just as the books did to other fans. Moreover, the screenplays were written by Steve Koves, who adapted Rowling's novels. Hence, the final product was the result of the work of Rowling along many other creators.

The textbooks and the Wizardingworld website would be regarded as secondary canon since they supplement and enlarge the available knowledge of the Potterverse. The film prequels *Fantastic Beasts*, however, are slightly more difficult to place. On the one hand they are films, so they could be regarded as direct prequels of the film

adaptations, and as such, they would qualify as parallel canon. On the other hand, these do not adapt existing novels so they could be regarded as enlarging the official canon albeit using a different platform. A third option would be to treat the *Fantastic Beasts* films as a wildcard in that they could fit into both the official and the parallel canon. The theme parks and the games would be considered distant canon as they are not a source in which scholars, critics or fans would go to in search of reliability.

Finally, the *The Cursed Child* is neither a novel nor a film; however, as in the *Fantastic Beasts* films, the play is the result of the work of Rowling, Tiffany and Thorne. Accordingly, basing this classification only in terms of authorship, *The Cursed Child* could be considered to belong to the parallel canon –or film canon–.

1.2. Authorship and *The Cursed Child*

In the cover of the printed version of the script reads that *The Cursed Child* is “based on an original story by J.K. Rowling, John Tiffany & Jack Thorne” (Joanne et al., cover). Moreover, the same can be read in three more instances; in the first pages, in page 324 where the creative and production team is listed and in the back cover. Yet, scholars and fans seem to be reticent to accept this. One of the reasons behind this hypothesis is that it is as if Rowling had forgotten the rules of the universe she created and that the characters seem to have been written by someone who does not know them.

The most disquieting about this matter is, however, that Rowling felt the need to tweet that “The story of #CursedChild should be considered canon, though. @jackthorne, John Tiffany (the director) and [her] developed it together” (Rowling). The fact that Rowling had to resort to her Twitter account to confirm both her involvement in the play and the *The Cursed Child*’s canon status is unprecedented and does not speak well about Rowling and *The Cursed Child*. Even if Rowling was not the author, this does not change the fact that it is based on the universe and the characters

that the author created two decades ago. However, this can only make one to wonder whether Rowling's words are enough for the Harry Potter fans to consider *The Cursed Child* as being part of the Harry Potter canon. The most evident answer would be that it does; or at least it should. If the alleged author of *The Cursed Child* says it is canon, then it should be considered as such. However, as we shall see, there is more to it than this.

As Derksen and Hick notes, "canon is open to change, seemingly at the whim of the legal authority" (Derksen and Hick). As an example, they discuss the adjustment in canon status caused by the change in the legal ownership of the *Star Wars* franchise from George Lucas to Disney (Derksen and Hick). Similarly, Marvel –also owned by Disney– has recently been making modifications in the canon status of some of their products. After the first *Avengers* movie, Marvel Television Studios produced *Marvel's Agents of Shield*, an ABC television series which was firstly regarded as belonging to the MCU canon since the show would connect with the upcoming movies. However, Marvel's television division headed by Jeph Loeb was eventually subsumed into Marvel Studios and *Marvel's Agents of Shield* (2013) stopped being considered part of the MCU canon. Also, the canon status of other Marvel Television Studios series such as *Daredevil* (2015) or *Jessica Jones* (2015) which aired on Netflix was questioned as well.

So, the author and/or the legal owner can change the canon status of a work and the audience, apparently, cannot do anything about it. As we have just seen in the last paragraph, an alteration in legal ownership may change the canon status of a given work. However, such revision can also be driven by criticism on the part of both the critics and the fans. Although *The Cursed Child* has received numerous awards, an enormous amount of fans feel not only disappointed with it, but also they either

consciously ignore its existence or do not consider it canon. This can be attested in the comments section below Rowling's tweet on *The Cursed Child* being canon, in which the general tendency is to refuse Rowling's petition to regard it as canon. Hence, as Derksen and Hick state, "when works in a series are particularly poorly received by fans, it is not unusual for legal authorities to overwrite them" (Derksen and Hick). Furthermore, as Clark affirms, *The Cursed Child* "has yet to withstand the test of temporal durability" (155). Consequently, although at the moment of writing this dissertation *The Cursed Child* is considered canon by Rowling, it could eventually be overwritten in a hypothetical new novel –or film– or get its canon status changed.

2. *The Cursed Child* and the unknown author

So far we have described what canon is; the complexities of establishing what constitutes canon in the Harry Potter franchise, and also, the fact that not only the author constitutes the authoritative voice in power to regard or disregard a given material as canon, but also that the figure of the legal owner comes into play. Furthermore, when discussing the extent to which Rowling was involved in the creation of this story I mentioned that fans and scholars seem not to wholly believe Rowling's words. Therefore, in the upcoming sections I will discuss what J.K. Rowling not being the author of *The Cursed Child* would entail and what it is that make fans feel confident about such strong claim.

2.1. J.K. Rowling and authorized fanfiction.

As it has been mentioned in various occasions, a vast majority of Harry Potter fans have refused to accept the canon status that *The Cursed Child* was designated with by Rowling. Instead, most claim that rather than developing the story together with

Tiffany and Thorne, Rowling only green-lighted it. Unfortunately, there is no way to know whether Rowling truly developed it; either way, each scenario has its own consequences.

Let us start by assuming that Rowling was, indeed, involved in the creation of the story that *The Cursed Child* tells. If this was actually the case, it would be the first known instance in which Rowling has worked together with other authors in the creation of brand new “canonical” material. This is of relevance since this collaborative way of creating *The Cursed Child* could set a precedent in the making of newer stories. Leaving aside the current controversial canon status of the play, the addition of one or more authors next to Rowling’s authorial credits in a new piece of work should not suppose a threat to its canon consideration; at least not without any other justified reason to argue otherwise.

Now, let us assume that Rowling did not co-create *The Cursed Child* and that she solely gave permission for it to be conceived. If Rowling was not involved in its process of creation, then *The Cursed Child* would be an authorized fanfiction based on Rowling’s already existing characters and stories. As Thomas notes: “The term fanfiction (sometimes abbreviated as fanfic) refers to stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a “canon” of works” (1). Fanfiction is not limited to literary works exclusively, Fanfiction.net and Wattpad.com are two web pages in which users can read and/or write fanfictions of any character, either fictional or real. Concerning *The Cursed Child*, if it was actually an authorized fanfiction, Rowling could have confirmed it in her tweet as well as asking the fans to consider it canon. After all, if Tiffany and Thorne’s story counted with Rowling’s consent, it would mean that –for Rowling– *The Cursed Child*’s quality bears a resemblance to the original saga and with a similar standard of quality. Moreover, it is

Rowling, as the author of these characters, who holds the power of deciding *The Cursed Child*'s canon status. Nonetheless, her tweet stating that she was involved in the creation of *The Cursed Child* could be the aftermath of attempting to avoid a hypothetical rejection of a story that, even though it is based on the Harry Potter world, was not created by its original author or to avoid fans to claim canon status for their fanfiction works.

Although fanfiction is usually well-regarded among fans and constitutes a key element in fandom, by claiming that *The Cursed Child* is a fanfiction work, not only are Harry Potter fans denying Rowling's implication in its development, but also they are using the word fanfiction pejoratively to refer to the play. In other words, it is employed to discredit or diminish the value of the work. One of the reasons for the fans to claim that *The Cursed Child* is authorized fanfiction lies in the fact that they consider the play to be poorly written and thus not attaining the same level of quality one would expect from Rowling. This is also connected with continuity issues, character development, unrealistic plotlines and contradictions that will be developed thoroughly in the following section.

2.2. *The Cursed Child* and the inconsistencies

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child further develops the story of Harry Potter through his son, Albus Potter. Originally, this story began in the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*'s epilogue, which has also been harshly criticized. Apparently, there is some sort of literary phenomenon in fanfiction called "Epilogue? What Epilogue?" in which the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*' epilogue is ignored (fanlore.org, 2020 quoted in Grødahl, 22). Despite the rejection that the epilogue caused among fans, Rowling –allegedly–, Tiffany and Thorne followed the path set by it to write the play.

The experience of reading a play and seeing it in person undoubtedly differs. Fans who have seen it at the Palace Theatre of London or in any other theatres where *The Cursed Child* is performed admit that it is much better to watch the play than to read it. Nevertheless, although plays are supposed to be watched and not read, the staging cannot be the greatest factor to take into account; in the end, the plot is what it is. Fans who have not had the opportunity to see the play and, therefore, have not been carried away by the magnificent special effects for which the play has been awarded in numerous occasions, have seen how *The Cursed Child* fails to withhold them in the magical world they already knew. As Grødahl also states, whether it is a fanfiction work or not, *The Cursed Child* “could face criticism and be deemed wrong or incompatible with canon by not only the invested “fan” reader, but also the average reader who would instantly recognise that the text does not present a believable continuation” (Grødahl 12).

Ronald A. Knox suggested that certain Sherlock Holmes stories were “inconsistent with the detective's character, with other accepted stories, and within themselves” (Knox, 1920, quoted in Derksen and Hudson) and that, therefore, they should not be considered canon (Derksen and Hudson). Consequently, I suggest that due to the fact that *The Cursed Child* is also inconsistent with the original characters' personality, with the previous seven books, and with itself, *The Cursed Child* should not be considered canon. Nonetheless, it could be considered an apocryphal text, that is, “with canonical scripture but not deemed genuine enough to be included in the” official “canon””. (Carver 154)

Firstly, the plot's main concern is that it is based on the fact that Voldemort and Bellatrix had a child named Delphini. This is problematic because when Voldemort is resurrected in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* he is described as “whiter than a

skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake's with slits for nostrils" (Rowling, *The Goblet of Fire* 643) and "His hands were like large, pale spiders; (...) [with] long white fingers; (...) [and] red eyes, whose pupils were slits, like a cat's" (Rowling, 644). In other words, Voldemort is a being that has been brought back to life several times; in his last resurrection his appearance resembled that of a snake and thus not completely human-like. For this reason, it is hard to believe that he could or would even think of procreating. Furthermore, as Dumbledore told Harry in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, "If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love" (Rowling, *The Philosopher's Stone* 216). That Voldemort had a child as an alternative solution seems rather implausible given that he put so much effort into creating the Horcruxes. Moreover, it feels extraordinarily mundane for a villain of such characteristics that he ever thought about offspring as a way of salvation. Although fans and scholars accepted that Voldemort was reproductively capable of producing an heir, it must not be forgotten that Voldemort and Bellatrix had to have sexual intercourse, which is highly unbelievable –partly because sexual relationships have not been addressed in the novels, and particularly, because it is Voldemort and Bellatrix who would be performing such act.

Moreover, the period of time in which Bellatrix was bearing her child does not seem to be entirely accurate. Bellatrix had to get pregnant in book seven and had to give birth to Delphini right before the Battle of Hogwarts where Molly Weasley finally put an end to her life. However, during the events of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* there was not any evidence of Bellatrix being pregnant. In addition, if Bellatrix had really been pregnant, Hermione would have noticed it when she transformed herself into Bellatrix, since whoever takes the Polyjuice Potion experiences the changes of the person being impersonated.

Even if readers accepted that Voldemort and Bellatrix had an heiress, the story of *The Cursed Child* would not be possible without the reappearance of the Time-Turners. As Hermione well remembers in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, “the entire stock of Ministry Time-Turners [were smashed] when [they] were there in the summer” (Rowling, *The Half-Blood Prince* 218). This is in accordance with Draco’s words in *The Cursed Child* when he asks Harry for the Ministry to “release a statement reaffirming that all Time-Turners were destroyed in the Battle of the Department of Mysteries” (Rowling, Tiffany and Thorne 22). Therefore, although the reintroduction of the Time-Turners is not exactly an inconsistency due to the fact that those are new devices, they are some sort of *deus ex machina* without which the plot could not be developed.

Additionally, not only did the authors reintroduce this rare magical device, but they also improved its properties, allowing the time traveller to go back years and decades instead of hours with the addition of not having to relive them. However, Scorpius acknowledges that “the further someone can go back in time without the possibility of serious harm to the traveller or time itself is five hours” (Rowling et al. 144). This acknowledgment supports what is known about Time-Turners from the original saga and from Professor Croaker’s law about time travel in Pottermore. These improved Time-Turners are untrustworthily rather convenient elements without which *The Cursed Child* could not work out. Moreover, Time-Turners are rare magical devices of which background information such as its creator(s), the level of difficulty of making them, how old the Time-Turners that the Ministry kept were or when was the last Time-Turner build is unknown. Yet, Rowling et al. included the upgraded Time-Turner element and moved on.

What certainly is a contradiction is Rowling's thoughts on time traveling: in a 2015 Pottermore-published excerpt, Rowling admitted that she did not take much care about time travelling in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and that, although she does not regret it, she amended future problems by having "Hermione [giving] back the only Time-Turner ever to enter Hogwarts (...) and [smashing] all remaining Time-Turners during the battle in the Department of Mysteries, removing the possibility of relieving even short periods in the future" (Rowling, 2015, Pottermore). Hence, the assumption of Rowling not being involved in *The Cursed Child*'s creation gains credibility since her statement refusing to resort to Time-Turners ever again was published a year before *The Cursed Child*'s opening day.

Also, the main reason for Albus and Scorpius to change the past is to avoid the death of Cedric Diggory. The reappearance of Amos Diggory, an irrelevant secondary character that only appears in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, serves to illustrate that almost two decades after, Harry still has Cedric's death very much in mind. Hence, Harry seems to suffer from survivor's guilt. However, as Clark suggests, "this seems odd, considering how many other people died in Harry's name (...)" (93).

Another relevant aspect in *The Cursed Child* is how the main characters that the readers already knew –Harry , Ron and Hermione– are depicted. It is true that 19 years have passed in the story since the readers knew about them for the last time. However, they seem to be out of place, to have lost their essence. That is, the characters' behaviour seem to have suffered a drastic change since the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*' ending, which does not appear to be the consequence of the passage of time. The readers who grew up reading the Harry Potter novels or even those who have simply watched the entire saga have seen how the characters matured book after

book by undergoing extreme situations. Therefore, the character change of the original trio that is depicted in *The Cursed Child* seems quite far-fetched.

For example, Hermione, now the Minister of Magic, hid a Time-Turner on the shelf of her office at the Ministry that Albus, Scorpius and Delphini got after solving a riddle. The place chosen by Hermione, one of the most brilliant witches, to hide such dangerous and valuable artefact is highly unfortunate. In addition, Ron is not auror as one would expect in consonance with what Ron states in the original saga, but works with his brother George at Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. Although he had been a goofy character in his early years, he grew up to be a full-grown wizard who had never showed any interest in working with his brothers. However, he is turned into the comic relief of the play. For the reader who only takes into account the printed material, that Ron is not an auror can be seen as another incoherence. Nonetheless, in one of the supplementary texts called *Dumbledore's Army Reunites at Quidditch World Cup Final* from the disappeared website Pottermore.com, Ron's change of mind regarding his professional occupation is explained. So, even though *The Cursed Child* contains numerous inconsistencies, Ron's profession would not qualify as one. Finally, what may shock the reader the most is seeing how Harry Potter, who was orphaned at an early age, is turned into an abusive father. In a fight with his son Albus, Harry replies "Well, there are times I wish you were not my son" (Rowling et al. 40). In a bed conversation with Ginny, he continues by saying that "[he wishes Albus] was more like James or Lily" (Rowling et al. 47). Other minor inconsistencies are the change of the lovely trolley witch for a not-so-lovely one in *The Cursed Child*, in which "[her] hands transfigured into very sharp spikes" (Rowling et al. 56) when Albus and Scorpius are about to hop off the train; or Cedric becoming a Death Eater after being humiliated during the second task of the Triwizard Tournament, thus ignoring the loyalty of a Hufflepuff student.

Finally, as Clark asserts, “time travel in CC allows fans to pursue alternate storylines, (...) by addressing several “what-ifs”” (Clark 94). Similarly, Disney + is about to release an animated television series called *What if ...?* in which Marvel characters are reimagined. In this sense, if *The Cursed Child* was considered as a whole as a “what-if” kind of story, it probably would not matter to fans whether *The Cursed Child* is or is not considered canon and it would let them enjoy the insane alternate universe that *The Cursed Child* offers.

3. Conclusions and Further Research

The purpose of this dissertation was to analyse the main factors that come into play for regarding or disregarding *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* as belonging to the official canon. These factors are authorship, and the nature of canon, that is, the cohesion of the play regarding the original novels and with the play itself.

In the first chapter, a definition of canon was provided in order to differentiate the canon as it is used in this dissertation from the classical conception of canon. After that, I problematized the classification of most of the Harry Potter materials so as to emphasize the difficulty of categorizing them, especially due to their distinct nature. The problem behind classifying the canonical materials of the Potterworld resides in the many directions in which the franchise has been widened. Since the seven Harry Potter novels have been adapted into films, the classification of new non-literary material complicates the task. That is, the *Fantastic Beasts* movies are written by J.K. Rowling but they do not adapt any existing novel; similarly, neither does *The Cursed Child*. Moreover, *The Cursed Child* is not the sole creation of Rowling but the result of a collaboration amongst Rowling, Tiffany and Thorne. At this stage of the dissertation I

suggested that if *The Cursed Child* were to be put somewhere in the classification, attending to its allegedly authorship it could be placed as belonging to the film canon.

In the following section, I discussed the issue of authorship as holding the authority to grant or withdraw canon status. Rowling's unclear involvement in the making of *The Cursed Child* and the fans' dissatisfaction with the play's plot lead fans to question its canonicity status. Consequently, Rowling clarified in a tweet that *The Cursed Child* should be considered canon and that it was written by Thorne, Tiffany and herself. Later on, in this same section it was stated that canon is open to change. Therefore, even though at the moment of writing this dissertation *The Cursed Child* had been given canon status by Rowling, this could be modified in the future.

In section two, I hypothesised about two different scenarios; in the first one, *The Cursed Child* as being co-created by Rowling, and in the second one, Rowling agreeing to bring *The Cursed Child* to theatres. If Rowling was indeed involved in the development of the story it would be the first instance in which she collaborates in the making of new Harry Potter material. The other possibility is that, as a vast majority of the fandom believe, Rowling only gave permission for *The Cursed Child* to happen. In other words, if that was truly the case, *The Cursed Child* would, then, be a work of fanfiction. Following this line of thought, I conclude that Rowling might have decided not to address its real authorship not to diminish the play's success or to prevent other fanfiction works to claim canon status.

In the last section, I discussed why *The Cursed Child* should not be considered canon by addressing the main elements that make the play resemble a fanfiction. That is, by paying special attention to inconsistencies with the original novels –e.g. Voldemort and Bellatrix having an offspring–, character development –e.g. Harry as an abusive father–, and other elements that detach so much from the original canon that

appear to be unreliable –e.g. Cedric becoming a Death Eater after being humiliated in the second task of the Triwizard Tournament.

Finally, a close analysis of both the primary and secondary sources has allowed me to validate my thesis statement and to argue that *The Cursed Child* should not be considered canon. The inconsistencies found in the plot seem to be more significant than whether or not Rowling participated in the development of the play. Moreover, as canon is open to change and there is a vast majority within the fandom that rejects *The Cursed Child*, its official canon status could be reversed.

Further research on this topic could be carried out in the field of psychology to analyze in depth the character’s personality so as to decipher and to try to make sense of such changes. Rowling was uncovered as *The Cuckoo’s Calling*’s author after a linguistic analysis that compared the novel to other Rowling works. Similarly, although the narrative style of *The Cursed Child*’s script differs from that of the novels, *The Cursed Child* could be linguistically analysed against the *Fantastic Beasts*’ scripts in order to prove Rowling’s involvement. Furthermore, the fan phenomenon could also be studied in order to understand the reasons behind the polarized opinions about *The Cursed Child*. Finally, although field work is uncommon in literature, a survey could be done after the play in order to assess the degree to which each inconsistency is accepted or rejected.

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