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Here Comes the Trickster?

Albus Dumbledore as the Trickster Figure in the *Harry Potter* Series

Among the works of popular culture published in the last decades, only a few can compete with the popularity of the *Harry Potter* series. The fantasy novels published by Joanne Kathleen Rowling between 1997 and 2007, accompanied by film adaptations (eight films released between 2001–2011 by Warner Bros¹), corresponding video games (produced by Electronic Arts), Harry Potter-themed toys, clothes, and even tourist attractions² have piqued fans' interest almost all over the globe and are a worth studying cultural and social phenomenon. Thus, it is not surprising that along with fandom affection, the *Harry Potter* series gained the interest of scholars and researchers from various disciplines. Rowling's fantasy novels were studied numerous times from the perspective of literary theory³, anthropology⁴, sociology⁵, pedagogy⁶, gender studies⁷,

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- 1 Four directors worked on the series: Chris Columbus (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*), Alfonso Cuarón (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*), Mike Newell (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*), and David Yates (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2*). Details about each adaptation are listed in filmography in the end of the article.
 - 2 E. g. *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* at Universal Orlando Resort in Florida.
 - 3 D. L. Wallace, T. Pugh, *Teaching English in the World: Playing with Critical Theory in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series*, "The English Journal" 2007, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Jan.), pp. 97–100.
 - 4 N. Wandinger, "Sacrifice" in the *Harry Potter* Series from a Girardian Perspective, "Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture" 2010, Vol. 17, pp. 27–51.
 - 5 D. H. Nexon, I. B. Neumann, *Harry Potter and International Relations*, Lanham 2006.
 - 6 M. M. Wagner and A. Lachance, *Mathematical Adventures with Harry Potter*, "Teaching Children Mathematics" 2004, Vol. 10, No. 5 (Jan.), pp. 274–277; S. Deets, *Wizarding in the Classroom: Teaching Harry Potter and Politics*, "PS: Political Science and Politics" 2009, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Oct.), pp. 741–744.
 - 7 M. Cherland, *Harry's Girls: Harry Potter and the Discourse of Gender*, "Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy" 2008/2009, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Dec., 2008–Jan., 2009), pp. 273–282.

and even linguistics⁸. However, despite the abundance of studies and a vast variety of approaches, there are still plenty of unanswered questions and fields that remain enigmatic and mysterious.

In the following article we aim to analyze the character of Albus Dumbledore, one of the protagonists of the series, as a trickster figure. Knowing that J. K. Rowling often refers to mythology, uses archetypes, and relies on symbolisms, it is worth studying whether the figure of trickster is present in her novels. We neither aim nor expect to prove that Dumbledore possesses all the features of an ideal trickster figure (as described in the next part of the article), yet his behavior and characteristics show that analysis in this perspective may give a new insight on the character, and in consequence lead to a better understanding of the *Harry Potter* series. Rowling's novels will serve as a primary source material, while film adaptations are necessary to enrich the analysis and compare selected scenes⁹. The novels will be analyzed in a chronological order, to reveal possible changes and the development of the character. The analysis will focus mostly on Dumbledore's relationship with Harry Potter, main protagonist and title character of the series. Along with this research material, Rowling's statements regarding the novels and the characters she created will serve as an additional context which will allow a more diverse insight.

The Trickster Mythology

Trickster figures appear quite frequently in myths of different cultures, and may take a variety of forms. In many cases tricksters are associated with animal categories¹⁰, however it should be pointed out that "very often the trickster label is given to any fictional character that is seen to be clever, deceitful, and selfish"¹¹, while of course these features may be present in different proportions for different trickster figures¹². For

8 A. Kłęczar, *Harry Potter, a Latin Speaker?*, "Biuletyn Glottodydaktyczny", No. 7, 2003, p. 77–89.

9 Certain scenes are shown differently in the film adaptations than in the novels (the scene from *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* when Harry is chosen for Triwizard Tournament, further described on page 7 of the following article, is a good example). We aim to analyse such differences and strive to explain their origin and their impact on of Dumbledore and Harry's relationship.

10 A detailed report on animal categories trickster figures may be associated with can be found in the study Lévi-Strauss, *Freud, and the Trickster: A New Perspective upon an Old Problem* written by Michael P. Carroll. Cf. M. P. Carroll, *Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the Trickster: A New Perspective upon an Old Problem*, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (May, 1981), pp. 301–313.

11 *Ibidem*, p. 305.

12 Cristiano Grottanelli addresses the possible troubles with defining trickster figures and mentions concerns about the usage of the term "trickster" raised by some scholars: "a series of very different and extremely complex figures of various mythologies have been unduly thrown together to form a hybrid, a monstrous abstraction". Ch. Grottanelli, *Tricksters, Scape-Goats, Champions, Saviors*, "History of Religions" 1983, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Nov.), p. 117.

example, the label of trickster can be easily given both to mischievous Loki from Norse mythology and, as Michael P. Carroll points, to Bugs Bunny¹³, an animated cartoon character from *Looney Tunes* series, despite huge and obvious differences between the two characters. Additionally, common features attributed to tricksters which may prove useful in the analysis of Dumbledore's character include individualism, solitary habits¹⁴, witty brain and craftiness, rather than power or strength¹⁵ (which may be connected with secret knowledge and often leads to trickery, deceit and acting in disguise), playful attitude¹⁶, and – of course – being a breaker of rules¹⁷, someone who violates a taboo, and disturbs natural or social order.

Referencing the works of Claude Levi-Strauss, Carroll further points out that the figure of trickster is always ambivalent, and

in many other stories, the trickster appears as a type of culture-hero, specifically as a transformer who makes the world habitable for humans by ridding it of monsters or who provides those things (such as fire or various ways of capturing animals) that make human society possible. In short, to borrow a phrase often used by Levi-Strauss, the trickster is associated in these stories with the origin of culture¹⁸.

Contradictory behavior and paradoxical nature of the trickster is also indicated by Christiano Grottanelli who states that “tricksters are breakers of rules”¹⁹, yet at the same time “they are often tragic in their own specific way”²⁰. Thus, the trickster, who can be “guilty and heroic”²¹ at the same time, serves both as an antagonist and as a protagonist (depending on the purpose of the story), and performs good deeds along with acts of trickery. He is not only uneasy to define but also it seems impossible to judge his moral status. In literature, this dualistic character has a major impact on the plot, often acting as a sort of catalyst to the storyline. The trickster, indirectly or

13 M. P. Carroll, op. cit., p. 305.

14 Ibidem, p. 307. In the study *The Development of the Trickster in Children's Narrative* David M. Abrams and Brian Sutton-Smith compare tricksters from various cultures and describe this feature as “lack of close, caring relationships” which may be connected with “apparent disregard for the feelings of others”. D. M. Abrams, B. Sutton-Smith, *The Development of the Trickster in Children's Narrative*, “The Journal of American Folklore” 1977, Vol. 90, No. 355 (Jan.–Mar.), p. 30.

15 Ch. Grottanelli, op. cit., p. 120.

16 Abrams and Sutton-Smith mention playful competitiveness, humor, and word plays of punning, variable behavior (breaking the rules as well as breaking routine habits and behaving in unconventional way) as common signs of the playfulness of the trickster. D. M. Abrams, B. Sutton-Smith, op. cit., pp. 33–34.

17 Ibidem.

18 M. P. Carroll, op. cit., p. 305.

19 Ch. Grotanelli, op. cit., p. 120.

20 Ibidem.

21 Ibidem, p. 135.

in mysterious ways, steers, controls or fuels the actions of other characters. The power of trickster lays in “the power of breaking boundaries, of getting away with it”²², explains Grottanelli, putting emphasis on the fact that the trickster does not follow the rules which apply to other characters from his narrative universe.

It is worth adding that the issue of trickster’s presence in modern literature has already been addressed by scholars. Many of them have done what we are doing in this article, that is tracked tricksters’ footsteps in various novels. We should mention here Robert C. Evans, who wrote an article on Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (describing the novel as “brimming with tricks, trickery and tricksters”²³) and Lewis Hyde who seeks for woman tricksters in American fiction²⁴. How Professor Dumbledore is depicted, and what trickster-like features he exhibits, will be shown in the next part of this article.

Dumbledore: study of the protagonist

Professor Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, is one of the first characters the readers meet in the series (and the first to enter the screen in the film adaptation), and from that very appearance, right in the heart of Muggles’ residence, he is shown as quite a unique personage:

Nothing like this man had ever been seen in Privet Drive. He was tall, thin and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak which swept the ground and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice²⁵.

Beard, cloak, old age – Dumbledore certainly “is a wizard in the legendary mould”²⁶, as David Colbert, who draws a clear parallel between Rowling’s hero and such characters like Merlin or Gandalf, puts it. Throughout the novel (and the whole series) readers become more and more acquainted with Dumbledore and so does Harry. When the Boy Who Lived unwraps a Chocolate Frog and finds one of Famous Witches and Wizards cards, he can read more about Dumbledore. He discovers that Dumbledore defeated dark wizard Grindelwald, wrote numerous books on alchemy

22 Ibidem, p. 139.

23 R. C. Evans, *The Trickster Tricked: Huck Come Out of the Fog in Mark Twain’s “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”* [in:] *The Trickster. Bloom’s literary themes*, ed. H. Bloom, B. Hobby, New York 2010, p. 1.

24 L. Hyde, *Where are the Women Tricksters?* [in:] *Trickster Lives: Culture and Myth in American Fiction*, ed. J. C. Reesman, University of Georgia, Athens 2001, pp. 185–208.

25 J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, London 2001, p. 12. For reader’s convenience in further footnotes the novels’ titles will be provided in an abbreviated form (i.e. PS).

26 D. Colbert, *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*, Lumina Press 2001, p. 70.

with Nicholas Flamel, discovered twelve uses of dragon blood, and is “considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times”²⁷. Similar phrases are used numerous times throughout the series by several characters, and may seem contradictory to the characteristics of the trickster provided by Carroll and Grottanelli. It is worth pointing out that while Dumbledore is said to be a great and powerful wizard, he does not show it on a daily basis.

Dumbledore’s airs match his eccentric character which corresponds with Abrams and Sutton-Smith’s description of the aforementioned playful attitude. One might suspect the headmaster’s way of being since the very beginning, when he offers professor McGonagall a sherbet lemon in the middle of a serious conversation about Voldemort’s downfall (“‘No, thank you’, said Professor McGonagall coldly, as though she didn’t think this was the moment for sherbet lemons”²⁸). Further events come to prove Dumbledore’s uncommon manners. The speech delivered during the banquet on Harry’s first evening at Hogwarts, provides a perfect example:

‘Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak! Thank you!’
He sat back down. Everybody clapped and cheered. Harry didn’t know whether to laugh or not. ‘Is he – a bit mad?’ He asked Percy uncertainly.
‘Mad?’ said Percy airily. ‘He’s a genius! Best wizard in the world. But he is a bit mad, yes’²⁹.

Dumbledore reveals himself not only as an eccentric, but also as a calm, brave, and kind-hearted professor. He is the one to quieten down the overwhelming panic at the Halloween banquet with one rumble³⁰. What is more, when Harry discovers the Mirror of Erised, an enchanted object which reflects not the viewer’s image but his heart’s deepest desire, the headmaster explains the ways the mirror works and gently tells Harry about its dangers. Even his presence somewhere in the castle is a guarantee of security – as pointed out by Hermione, who assures Harry that “as long as Dumbledore’s around, you’re safe”³¹. His wisdom is the key factor which, according to Agnieszka Sobich, makes Dumbledore a true master who accompanies and supports

27 PS, p. 77. Later, when the Ministry of Magic becomes at variance with Dumbledore, he is deprived of many of his official functions and more and more deprecating articles are published in *The Daily Prophet*, Dumbledore is reported to say that “he doesn’t care what they do as long as they don’t take him off the Chocolate Frog Cards”. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, London 2003, p. 90.

28 PS, p. 14.

29 PS, p. 92.

30 “Silence!” he yells in the film (1:06, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, dir. C. Columbus, 2001), in the book he adds “several purple firecrackers” (PS, p. 128).

31 1:45, PS.

his student, not just a teacher³². Moreover, Dumbledore earns fierce loyalty – Harry himself will become a proof of it – but in the first book it is Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys at Hogwarts who defends the headmaster’s honour. When Harry’s uncle, Vernon Dursley, insults Dumbledore and addresses him as “some crackpot old fool”³³, Hagrid takes vengeance and conjures up a curly pigs tail right on Dudley Vernon’s bottom.

Therefore, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* Albus Dumbledore is depicted as a noble, powerful (yet we do not have detailed information on his abilities, except for the fact that he does not need an Invisibility Cloak to become invisible³⁴), calm, good-natured, and somewhat unconventional and uncanny wizard. Although some of his actions might be doubtful – has he not seen that Quirrell had become possessed by Lord Voldemort³⁵? Did he really show Harry the Mirror of Erised to allow him to face You-Know-Who? – he remains a true authority. He provides crucial explanations (e.g. the final conversation with Harry in the hospital wing, when Dumbledore explains the importance of Harry’s mother love and the sacrifice³⁶) and occasionally making jokes about various matters (“What happened down in the dungeons between you and Professor Quirrell is a complete secrete, so, naturally, the whole school knows”³⁷ – playful attitude again!). This image is well-supported by the film adaptation, where Professor Dumbledore is portrayed by dignified Richard Harris.

A similar depiction of Professor Dumbledore – as a wise, powerful, and eccentric wizard – is provided by further books. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* the headmaster, though gravely disappointed, treats Harry and Ron with understanding even though they have seriously violated wizarding laws and injured the Whomping Willow. He is perfectly calm, especially in contrast to agitated Professor Snape who would gladly see both students expelled. This contrast is even more visible in the film adaptation, when Dumbledore (also played by Richard Harris) gently reminds Snape (portrayed by Alan Rickman) that “I am well aware of our bylaws, Severus, having written quite a few of them myself”³⁸. This sets the headmaster as the order-giving, rule-creating authority who does not hesitate to bend the rules when it suits him

32 Cf. A. Sobich, *Mistrz – nauczyciel w świecie magii* [in:] *Kulturowe konteksty baśni, t. 2*, ed. G. Leszczyński, Poznań 2006, pp. 69-97.

33 *PS*, p. 48.

34 *PS*, p. 156.

35 Only in the last novel Dumbledore’s concern is revealed, when he asks Snape “Keep an eye on Quirrell, won’t you?”, according to Snape’s memories. Cf. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, London 2007, p. 545.

36 This manner of “explaining everything conversation” have become a sort of tradition in the series, most of the books include one somewhere in the end. Still, in the first novel, Professor Dumbledore chooses not to reveal everything when he has “very good reasons not to” (*PS*, p. 216).

37 *PS*, p. 214.

38 0:31, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, dir. C. Columbus, 2002.

(which is a classic trickster behaviour, as presented by Grotanelli, Abrams, and Sutton-Smith). Dumbledore continues to act somewhat incomprehensibly: his sound mind might be questioned when he hires Gilderoy Lockhart. Strangely enough, when dangerous accidents continue to occur, Dumbledore is removed from his headmaster's position – which only allows Harry and Ron to take action³⁹. In the final clash between Harry and ghost-like Tom Riddle in the Chamber of Secrets, Dumbledore sends Harry quite an usual form of aid (doesn't it look like a perfect trickster-like behaviour?): Fawkes, the headmaster's pet phoenix, brings the Sorting Hat. Riddle is sure to mock Fawkes' arrival: "This is what Dumbledore sends his defender! A songbird and an old hat!"⁴⁰. Nevertheless, the two artefacts reveal themselves as indispensable – Harry is able to defeat the basilisk with Gryffindor's sword withdrawn from the hat, and Fawkes cures boy's fatal wounds. After those climax scenes the 'final conversation' takes place. This conversation seems to have become a certain tradition and appears in nearly every book in the series (including the conversation with the headmaster's portrait in the last novel). It is worth noticing that Dumbledore does not seem to be surprised with Harry's ability to speak Parseltongue. Glad and serene headmaster kindly receives also the visit of Lucius Malfoy, never ceasing to lose his good manners⁴¹.

Good manners are maintained, yet more and more hints suggesting Dumbledore's ambivalence are found in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. The going-back-in-time sequence would pose as a fine example, as it clearly shows that it is not in Dumbledore's nature to give precise and exact instructions to anyone (this tendency is driven to the extremes in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*⁴² and determines Dumbledore's trickster-like character). When the dreadful events in the Shrieking Shack come to an end⁴³ and Harry, Ron, and Hermione are carefully tended to in the school's hospital wing, it occurs that Sirius Black, the title Prisoner of Azkaban (wizarding prison) is about to face the horrible kiss of the Dementors, which would

39 As put by D. Colbert, "The hero encounters the first threshold to a new world. The protector can only lead the hero to the threshold; the hero must cross it alone". D. Colbert, op. cit., p. 160.

40 J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, London 1998, p. 233.

41 Including later confrontations with those characters, who might not be worthy of such kindness, like Dolores Umbridge, Rita Skeeter (both in *The Order of Phoenix*), and Bellatrix Lestrange (the scene on the Astronomy Tower in *The Half-Blood Prince*).

42 First example would be the headmaster's enigmatic last will, and the second the conversation between Harry and Aberforth, Dumbledore's younger brother: "Dumbledore explained it all", says Harry and Aberforth is quite amused with such a statement: "Oh, did he, now? And did he tell you everything, was he honest with you?". Harry wanted with all his heart to say 'yes', but somehow the simple word would not rise to his lips. Aberforth seemed to know what he was thinking". Cf.: *DH*, p. 453.

43 These dreadful events include: meeting an unexpected friend/enemy, learning that one of Hogwarts teachers is a werewolf, and an encounter with hundreds of Dementors.

remove his soul from his body. Harry knows that Black is blameless, but when he learns that Dumbledore cannot save the ex-prisoner, he feels as if all hope has gone because he “had grown used to the idea that Dumbledore could solve anything”⁴⁴. Yet it turns out that the headmaster’s brilliant mind has provided a solution anyway, as he says:

Sirius is locked in a Professor’s Flitwick’s office on the seventh floor. Thirteenth window from the right of the West Tower. If all goes well, you will be able to save more than one innocent life tonight [...] it’s five minutes to midnight. Miss Granger, three turns should do it. Good luck⁴⁵.

One cannot help but wonder why Harry is utterly perplexed (“What’s he talking about? What are we supposed to do?”⁴⁶). Luckily Hermione understands a little bit more from Dumbledore’s instructions. They both travel back in time to rescue Buckbeak the Hippogriff first, then they fly him, and collect Sirius from his temporary custody in Flitwick’s office. The headmaster is pleased with the result of their mission and, of course, provides Harry with traditional ‘final conversation’, explaining, among others, the importance of Harry’s bond with Peter Pettigrew (Voldemort’s ally, responsible for the death of Harry’s parents).

As for the film, from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* to the last adaptation, Albus Dumbledore is portrayed by Michael Gambon whose interpretation of the character is definitely more energetic than Richard Harris’. Still, the professor’s tricksterish behaviour remains visible. Although in the third film the headmaster rarely graces the screen with his presence, he is often behind the most important events presented, and when he appears, it matters a lot. These appearances are important both for the plot, and for our analysis of Dumbledore as a trickster figure, especially in the going-back-in-time sequence, when Dumbledore deliberately distracts the Minister of Magic’s attention, allowing Harry and Hermione to free Buckbeak and later, when he fails to acknowledge they saved Sirius’s life (“We did it!”, says Harry enthusiastically. “Did what?” asks the headmaster as if he knew nothing⁴⁷). In the novel, he is more willing to congratulate and praise the protagonists for their bravery (“Dumbledore beamed at them. ‘Well done’ [he said]”⁴⁸).

Trickster-like actions are growing and growing in numbers. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when Harry is forced to take part in dangerous and challenging Triwizard Tournament, Dumbledore allows him to do so even if the circumstances

44 J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, London 2000, p. 288.

45 Ibidem.

46 Ibidem.

47 2:02, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, dir. A. Cuarón, 2004.

48 *PoA*, p. 305.

are more than suspicious. This very scene in the film adaptation is worth a closer look, not only because the headmaster appears as a character particularly distant from the calm image the reader was used to: enraged, he shakes Harry, yelling “Did you put your name in the Goblet of fire?!”⁴⁹. Dumbledore decides to use Harry as a bait to help unravel the thread beyond mysterious events which happened so far (including the appearance of the Voldemort’s Dark Mark after the Quidditch Cup final). It is a purely political action – unlike Professor MacGonagall, Professor Snape is more than willing to support this idea (Snape, a spy and double-agent, is well familiar with the art of deception, whereas high-principled McGonagall simply cannot withstand such a tricksterish behaviour). Yet it must be admitted that he still cared for Harry: he asked Professor Moody to have an eye (literally) on Harry during the tournament⁵⁰. Only during the ‘final conversation’ in the film, Dumbledore honestly admits that he has put Harry in a “terrible danger” and apologizes for it⁵¹. The apologies are followed by a firm reassurance of support (“You have friends here. You are not alone”⁵²), albeit the dark times lie ahead.

Dark times come, indeed, in the following novels and their adaptations, as Voldemort, Harry’s arch-enemy, has finally restored his human form and plans to assume power and eventually kill the Boy Who Lived. Not everyone is able to accept the truth about You-Know-Who’s return. Harry and Dumbledore pose as the unwanted voice of reason, while the Ministry of Magic (lead by Cornelius Fudge, the Minister) obstinately refuses to believe them. The Order of Phoenix, a secret society opposing Voldemort and founded by Dumbledore years before, is on the move again. Harry, furious and emotionally unstable teenager who in *The Order of Phoenix* is mocked and treated as a lunatic, is in desperate need of someone to calm him down. Yet Dumbledore tells Harry nothing. Moreover, he advises the others to do likewise (“We couldn’t tell you anything, Dumbledore made us swear we wouldn’t”, explains Hermione when the trio meets in the Order of Phoenix headquarters⁵³), and even to avoid any contact with the boy⁵⁴. Only at the end of the novel Dumbledore reveals the reasons behind his actions and shares his secret knowledge with the rest of the Order. This trickster-like behaviour seems more than strange, and Dumbledore’s final explanation – “If

49 0:36, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, dir. M. Newell, 2005 – far, far away from the very same question “asked calmly” in the novel, cf. J. K. Rowling *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, London 2003, p. 242.

50 0:37, *GoF*.

51 2:20, *GoF*.

52 2:21, *GoF*.

53 *OoP*, p. 61.

54 This deliberate lack of contact is clearly shown in the film adaptation: no matter how much Harry tries, he cannot engage in any conversation with the headmaster, as if Dumbledore was escaping from him. Cf. 0:24, 0:47, 1:05, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, dir. D. Yates, 2007.

I had been open with you, Harry, as I should have been, you would have known a long time ago that Voldemort might try and lure you to the Department of Mysteries [...] the blame lies with me, and me alone”⁵⁵ – does not seem to be sufficient. If he had provided Harry with more information, maybe not very detailed, but only revealing certain purpose, some tragic events would have been prevented, especially the death of Sirius, who has grown to be Harry’s cherished friend and godfather. In the film adaptation the headmaster does not hesitate to acknowledge that he was at fault and apologise, explaining that the only reason he had for not sharing his knowledge with Harry was that he did not want to cause Harry more pain⁵⁶.

The relationship between Harry and Dumbledore is tightened even more in the next to last book, *The Half-Blood Prince*. At the beginning of the novel, they complete a successful mission, persuading Professor Slughorn to return to Hogwarts⁵⁷. But most importantly, during Harry’s sixth year, Dumbledore offers him private lessons and starts to explain some facts from the life of Tom Riddle a.k.a. Lord Voldemort, including – finally! – the only possible way to defeat You-Know-Who. Once again he proves that just like a true trickster he knows much more than he had previously revealed, and has a carefully prepared plan of action. After one destroys all Horcruxes (the objects to which Voldemort had transferred a part of his soul), the arch-enemy can be killed once and for all. Yet again Dumbledore prefers not to share everything with Harry, seemingly underestimating Harry’s suspicions concerning Draco Malfoy and his mistrust towards Snape (“I do not that it [Harry’s concerns] is of great importance”, says headmaster with an impassive face, astonishing and infuriating the boy⁵⁸). However, Harry is allowed to accompany Dumbledore in the quest to acquire one of the Horcruxes – mission not perfectly completed, as the obtained object turns out to be fake – and thus treated very seriously⁵⁹. And when Dumbledore is killed by Snape at the end of *Half-Blood Prince* (very trickster-like plan lied behind this act, as the readers learn in the last novel), Harry bewails him with a great sense of loss.

Therefore, the relationship between Harry and Dumbledore appears to be complex and complicated. Many similarities can be found between both wizards, e.g. they both used to live for a while in Godric’s Hollow and have lost their families there.

55 *OoP*, p. 728.

56 “I thought by distancing myself from you as I have done all year he’d [Voldemort] would be less tempted and therefore you might be more protected”. Cf. 1:59, *OoP*.

57 Dumbledore reveals himself to be a perfect manipulator, cunningly making use of Slughorn’s weaker points.

58 See: *HBP*, p. 335. No one seems to believe Harry in that point – when he shares his doubts with Lupin, he follows Dumbledore’s opinion: “It comes down to whether or not you trust Dumbledore’s judgement. I do; therefore I trust Snape” (ibidem, p. 311).

59 “It was very good not to hear words of caution and protection for once”, admits Harry. Cf. *HBP*, p. 474.

Harry treats the headmaster with all possible respect and trust⁶⁰, and does not hesitate to call himself “Dumbledore’s man through and through” twice in *The Half-Blood Prince*⁶¹. This sound and reliable relationship becomes somewhat threatened when Harry starts to discover more and more shameful events from Dumbledore’s life. The headmaster’s credibility is undermined for the first time at Bill and Fleur’s wedding: Aunt Muriel reveals that Dumbledore had a brother and lived in Godric’s Hollow⁶². In the film adaptation, she even asks Harry ironically “Honestly, my boy, are you sure you knew him at all?”⁶³. This observation corresponds well with the description of the trickster provided by Abrams and Sutton-Smith. Despite the fact that Harry and Dumbledore’s relationship is of great importance and that they both risked lives fighting together against Voldemort, Harry seems to be hurt by the “lack of close, caring relationships”⁶⁴ with his mentor. Eventually, Potter cannot help but wonder why the headmaster – so admired and respected – never told him anything about his personal life. Harry is especially irritated with Dumbledore’s friendship with Gellert Grindelwald and their idea of wizard dominance over Muggles. No wonder Harry bitterly denies Hermione’s assurance of Dumbledore’s love and loyalty:

I don’t know who he loved, Hermione, but it was never me. This isn’t love, the mess he’s left me in. He shared a damn sight more of what he was really thinking with Gellert Grindelwald than he ever shared with me⁶⁵.

Dumbledore’s darker side, although revealed and described as a tabloid sensation by infamous Rita Skeeter, haunts Harry for a long time. On the other hand, the headmaster’s attitude to Harry seems to be only positive and approving. He acknowledges all of Harry’s virtues: this can be understood immediately from headmaster’s last words to Kingsley and Lupin (“Harry is the best hope we have. Trust him”⁶⁶), or when

60 As put in the third novel, Dumbledore “was often described as the greatest wizard of the age, but that wasn’t why Harry respected him. You couldn’t help trust Albus Dumbledore”. Cf. *PoA*, p. 71.

61 Cf. *HBP*, p. 326 and p. 605.

62 Cf. *DH*, p. 132.

63 0:33, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1*, dir. D. Yates, 2010.

64 D. M. Abrams, B. Sutton-Smith, op. cit., p. 30.

65 *DH*, p. 295. This bitter remark and comparison with Grindelwald becomes even more bitter when collated with Rowling’s statement concerning Dumbledore’s sexual orientation. “I always thought of Dumbledore as gay [...]. Dumbledore fell in love with Grindelwald, and that that added to his horror when Grindelwald showed himself to be what he was”, she admitted during the meeting with the readers at Carnegie Hall, New York in 2007. See: *J. K. Rowling at Carnegie Hall Reveals Dumbledore is Gay; Neville Marries Hannah Abbott, and Much More*, The Leaky Cauldron, 20.10.2007 [on-line:] <http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/2007/10/20/j-k-rowling-at-carnegie-hall-reveals-dumbledore-is-gay-neville-marries-hannah-abbott-and-scores-more/> [14.08.2016]

66 Recalled by Lupin in both film and novel, see *DH*, p. 65 and 0:19, *DH 1*.

he trustfully confesses: “I am not worried [...], I’m with you”⁶⁷, just before the two of them have emerged from the cave where one of the Horcruxes had been hidden. Yet there is more in this relationship that meets the eye: Dumbledore’s most trickster-like behaviour is revealed late in the last novel, when Harry digs into Snape’s memories and bears witness to a stormy conversation between the Potions teacher and the headmaster⁶⁸. With a certain degree of resignation, Harry discovers that he was being raised by Dumbledore “like a pig to slaughter”⁶⁹ (as ruthlessly yet accurately put by Snape), only to be ready to die at the proper moment, and hence bring the end to Voldemort’s life as well. Harry’s recognition of the truth serve as the ultimate proof of the fact that Dumbledore was not a flawless character:

Dumbledore’s betrayal was almost nothing. Of course there had been a bigger plan; Harry had simply been too foolish to see it, he realised that now [...]. Dumbledore had passed the job of destroying them [Horcruxes] to him, and obediently he had continued to chip away the bond tying not only Voldemort, but himself, to life! How neat, how elegant, not to waste any more lives, but to give the dangerous task to the boy who had already been marked for slaughter⁷⁰.

Harry, although now aware of the whole plan and its consequences, does not hesitate to confront Voldemort and to sacrifice himself. And then, just after Voldemort uses the Killing Curse, Harry finds himself somewhere in between life and death, once again talking to Professor Dumbledore (who matter-of-factly admits to be dead). Headmaster praises Harry (“You wonderful boy. You brave, brave man”⁷¹), acknowledges his own mistakes and begs for forgiveness, admitting that Harry is a much better man than he himself ever was. Dumbledore compares his selfishness and obsession with Grindelwald’s ideas with Harry’s voluntary sacrifice and him becoming the true master of Deathly Hallows. This conversation purifies the relationship of the protagonists and prepares Harry for the ultimate clash with Voldemort (it is worth noticing, though, that in the film adaptation no apology is included and the whole scene consists rather of Harry asking for advice)⁷². In the end, when the evil is

67 It is worth mentioning that Snape also feels that Dumbledore does not trust him completely: “You refuse to tell me everything!”, he snarls. Cf. *HBP*, p. 540.

68 *DH*, p. 550.

69 *DH*, p. 551. The issue of Harry’s “self-sacrifice” made in order to destroy Voldemort is addressed in detail in Nikolaus Wandinger’s study “Sacrifice” in the *Harry Potter Series from a Girardian Perspective*. Cf. N. Wandinger, “Sacrifice” in the *Harry Potter Series from a Girardian Perspective*, “Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture” 2010, Vol. 17, pp. 27-51.

70 *DH*, p. 555.

71 *DH*, p. 566.

72 Cf. 1:28, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2*, dir. D. Yates, 2011

conquered and all the resentments are eased, the last ‘final conversation’ takes place. Dumbledore talks to Harry from his portrait in the headmaster’s office, and “the pride and the gratitude emanating from him filled Harry with the same balm as phoenix song”⁷³. Voldemort defeated, the Deathly Hallows dispersed, peace restored – the noble hero and his trickster-like mentor can have some rest at last. Harry’s devotion to Dumbledore finds one last expression when he names his second son after two headmasters of Hogwarts: Albus and Severus.

Conclusions

The mere thought that the Headmaster of Hogwarts and the leader of the Order of Phoenix – the mythical bird perceived by many as a symbol of good and light⁷⁴ that can prevail over Voldemort’s evil and dark magic – would believe and act as if the end justifies the means is confusing and unsettling, not only for Harry, but also for the readers of the novel. A personal example might be given here: when the plan of this very article was mentioned to one of our academic friends, a huge Potter fan, she was all “Dumbledore? A trickster? Never!”, only to admit a few days later that she reconsidered the idea and there is definitely something to it. Dumbledore’s not-so-very-much-logical behaviour did not go unnoticed by the fandom. Memes highlighting some of the headmaster’s actions⁷⁵ or comics showing how irresponsible he was⁷⁶ have flooded the Internet long time ago. However, one may ask whether it is more likely that “best wizard in the world” was indeed irresponsible and behaved illogically, or that he was following his own carefully prepared plan of action.

The essential question should be asked: is Dumbledore a trickster or not? Naturally, he cannot be perceived as classic trickster such as the North American Coyote or the Loki of Asgard who are mischievous characters, meddling and interfering in the course of the events. But then again the headmaster of Hogwarts is certainly not an impeccable, crystal-like hero, and while he was clearly against Voldemort, the moral status of many of his actions remain questionable. Eccentric air, plotting his own

73 *DH*, p. 599.

74 Clearly visible in the name of the Dumbledore’s Army, a group established by Hogwarts’ students as a counter-move to the Ministry of Magic’s educational programme. Cf. *OoP*, p. 347.

75 Like the one with establishing rules, imitating Dumbledore’s speech in the beginning of the school year: “The Dark forest is strictly forbidden to all students, except for detention, where you will be forced to wander around when it’s darkest and scariest. Doesn’t that make so much sense. I’m so good at rules. Ten points to Dumbledore”. Cf. 10 Points from/for Gryffindor Images, Know Your Meme [on-line:] <http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/891821-10-points-fromfor-gryffindor> [27.07.2016].

76 An example selection can be found here: *10+ Funny ‘Harry Potter’ Comics Reveal How Irresponsible Dumbledore Was*, Bored Panda [on-line:] <http://www.boredpanda.com/irresponsible-dumbledore-funny-harry-potter-comics> [27.07.2016]

plans (including conjuring his own death!), steering other characters' actions (often without their knowledge and awareness), the dark past (do remember Grindelwald and "for the greater good") – all of Dumbledore's traits form an ambivalent character, both "guilty and heroic", as Grotanelli puts it. His ambivalence is shown both in the novels and in the film adaptations, although the emphasis is placed differently (for example, trickster-like behaviour in the *Prisoner of Azkaban's* going-back-in-time sequence is stressed in the film version). Therefore, we do not urge that Dumbledore is a trickster, but we strongly believe that analysing his character in the light of the mythical trickster figure can provide new interpretations and add new threads to the academic research on the *Harry Potter* series, and to the trickster lore as well. There is definitely something to it.

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Absolwentka kulturoznawstwa na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim, obecnie doktorantka na Wydziale Filozoficznym UJ, gdzie przygotowuje rozprawę naukową koncentrującą się na zagadnieniu postpamięci i jej wpływu na tożsamość powojennego pokolenia w najnowszych tekstach polskich. Redaktorka Magazynu Antropologiczno-Społeczno-Kulturowego „Maska” (ISSN 1898-5947) oraz pisma „Estetyka i Krytyka” (ISSN: 1643 1243).

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Abstrakt

Seria o Harrym Potterze pióra J. K. Rowling, fenomen kulturowy ostatnich lat, obfituje w intertekstualne nawiązania historyczne i mitologiczne. W niniejszym rozdziale badamy, czy wśród tych nawiązań znajduje się także figura trickstera. Albus Dumbledore, ekscentryczny dyrektor Hogwartu, jawi się jako bohater wyjątkowo ambiwalentny – choć nie można zaklasyfikować go jako klasycznego trickstera, to jednak jego działania interpretowane przez pryzmat tego archetypu rzucają nowe światło na jego postać i całą serię.