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The Influence of Myths and Legends on the Harry Potter Series of Books

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Studentka se ve své bakalářské práci zaměří na vliv mýtů a legend na knihy o Harry Potterovi. Studentka bude nejprve obecně charakterizovat žánry mýtu a legendy, jejich vývoj a tradici v britské literatuře. Dále uvede J. K. Rowlingovou a vybrané knihy o Harry Potterovi do soudobého literárního kontextu. Těžiště literární analýzy bude spočívat v identifikaci mytologických prvků a vlivu legend na zvolená díla této autorky. Studentka vytvoří analytický akademický text založený na dostatečném množství kvalitních primárních a sekundárních zdrojů.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis deals with Celtic and Greek myths, analyzes their aspects and compares them with the work of J.K. Rowling about Harry Potter. The aim of the thesis is to prove the linkage between Rowling's work and the above mentioned mythologies, to emphasize their main aspects and point out their similarity. The work begins with an introduction, which states why Greek and Celtic mythologies were chosen, and introduces the basic overview about Harry Potter. The first chapter focuses on putting Harry Potter in the genre of fantasy and into a broader literary context. The following chapters deal with the theory and an overview of the genre of mythology in general and also of Celtic and Greek mythology. The last two chapters deal with specific examples from Greek and Celtic myths that had an impact on the creation of the Harry Potter's world. The work ends with a summary and conclusion of exploring the similarities of Greek and Celtic myths and stories about Harry Potter.

## **Key words**

Harry Potter, myths, Greek mythology, Celtic mythology, fantasy

## **Anotace**

Tato práce se zabývá keltskými a řeckými mýty a analyzuje jejich aspekty, které srovnává s dílem J. K. Rowlingové o Harry Potterovi. Cílem práce je dokázat, že Rowlingová při psaní čerpala svou inspiraci z výše zmíněných mýtů, dále zdůraznit společné aspekty příběhů o Harry Potterovi a příběhů mytologických a poukázat tak na jejich podobnost. Práce začíná úvodem, kde je upřesněno, proč byla zvolena právě keltská a řecká mytologie a uvádí do základního přehledu o Harry Potterovi. První kapitola se zabývá zařazením Harryho Pottera do žánru fantasy a širšího literárního kontextu. Další kapitoly se zabývají teorií a přehledem mytologie a přibližují mytologii keltskou a řeckou. Poslední dvě kapitoly se zabývají konkrétními ukázkami z keltských a řeckých mýtů a legend, které měly vliv na Rowlingovou při tvorbě světa Harryho Pottera. Práce je zakončena shrnutím a závěrem o zkoumání podobnosti keltských a řeckých mýtů a příběhů o Harry Potterovi.

## **Klíčová slova:**

Harry Potter, mýty, řecká mytologie, keltská mytologie, fantasy

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## INTRODUCTION

Myths and legends have always been a part of human life and history. It may seem that they are slowly disappearing to be replaced by new, modern literary genres but in fact they have strong roots and are hidden in fairy tales, modern children stories and in fantasy novels written for adult readers. A perfect example of mythology hidden in a fantasy story is the worldwide known wizard Harry Potter who seems to be a legend himself. There is not even the need to be interested in fantastic literature to hear about him; this young wizard has become a world phenomenon. Not only children and youth love Harry Potter's world, but also adult readers find interest in it because of its imaginativeness and originality. But there may be more than the quality of the novels themselves. Perhaps, it is not only because of Harry Potter, but it could be because of the myths hidden throughout all seven books written by J. K. Rowling.

Based on the magical creatures, symbols and rituals appearing in the Harry Potter novels, this paper claims that J. K. Rowling drew from world mythologies and used their features to help her create the magical world of Harry Potter. This bachelor paper deals with the influence of world's myths and legends on the work of J. K. Rowling, and its aim is to uncover these myths, introduce the mythological sources used by J. K. Rowling and show the reader that many characters and creatures mentioned by Rowling resemble characters and creatures told about in myths and legends and thus to prove that myths and legends are not forgotten and are still a part of human lives and literature for their timelessness and informative value.

As mythology is a very broad term, it will not be dealt with as a whole. The mythology of old Celts and Greek were chosen, because those two had undoubtedly the greatest impact on Rowling while writing Harry Potter. With Celtic myths, Harry Potter shares the place of origin, the British Isles and therefore it is ideal to use this rich source of inspiration. As for the Greek mythology, this one is probably the best known throughout the whole world and it is thus clear that its heroic stories and supernatural being came to life again under Rowling's magical quill.

It is certain that Harry Potter resembles the mythological tales only partially, not as a whole text. For example, the setting of Harry Potter's story is completely clear – Potter's world exists as a parallel to our ordinary world as we know it, wizards live together with muggles, people with no magical skills, and they have no idea about the existence of the wizard world. History and events of these two worlds are the same, only with the difference in explaining the causes and reasons of



certain events. On the other hand, mythological stories, as Mocná says, tell of the events preceding history, events that happened in ancient times, and thus contrast with the history as they are built before or outside of historical time.<sup>1</sup> However, it is still possible to find similarities, not only in the characters and beasts which Rowling was inspired by, but also in the way of world order. According to Mocná, mythological world is divided into natural and supernatural part where the supernatural part is the dominant one.<sup>2</sup> That can be seen as a similar thing between the wizard and the Muggle world, although the muggles are not aware of how much the wizards affect their lives, or even that the wizards exist.

The first part of the paper classifies the genre of fantasy and explains why the Potter novels belong within this genre. That is followed by a brief description of the genre of mythology in general and also briefly describes the world mythologies that have the biggest influence on Harry Potter novels. The chosen mythologies are Greek mythology and Celtic myths and legends of the British Isles. Then, the main features of these mythologies are described and compared to their versions written by J. K. Rowling in the Harry Potter books. Each mythological feature is described according to the original text and then quotations from Harry Potter are used and these are analyzed and compared.

The theoretical part and practical part of the thesis are not clearly divided from each other as it seems to be the best solution to support a claim with an example straight away. In these cases, literal quotations are used and explained.

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<sup>1</sup> MOCNÁ, D. *Encyklopedie literárních žánrů*. Litomyšl: Paseka. 2004. P. 400. ISBN 80-7185-669-X.

<sup>2</sup> MOCNÁ, D. *Encyklopedie literárních žánrů*. Litomyšl: Paseka. 2004. P. 400. ISBN 80-7185-669-X.

# 1 THE GENRE OF FANTASY

The main aim of the paper is to find the mythological features that influenced J. K. Rowling while writing Harry Potter and compare them to their Potter versions, but it is also necessary to put the Potter novels into a broader literary context. There is no doubt that Harry Potter belongs within the fantasy genre, as it is set into a world of magic, wizards and extraordinary creatures.

The tradition of the modern fantasy literature dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was the bloom of Romanticism. During the period of Romanticism, fantasy first occurred as a new, independent genre but the roots of fantastic literature go much more further to the history. Romantic authors were fascinated with nature, myths and heroes, and in the works from the period of Romanticism, a strong interest in supernatural features and dream-like mood can be found. The genre of fantasy is often inspired by mythological or medieval times and creates an imaginative world. In his definition, Clude states that in fantasy, a hero often comes to this imaginary world from the real one; he uses the term “otherworld” when talking about the imaginative world.

A fantasy text is self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms.<sup>3</sup>

Because of its diversity, fantasy seems rather difficult to define. The term fantasy started to penetrate into English literature in the nineteenth century. Most of it was meant for children, but there were also adult fantasy books, specifically ghost and horror stories developed from the Gothic novel. The best example of that time’s fantasy for adults is the work of Edgar Allan Poe. But however difficult it may be, it still can be defined as a genre in which magic and supernatural powers play a very significant role.<sup>4</sup> According to Vančo, fantasy is “a genre in which the situations and phenomena differ from the believable and ‘tangible’ reality. The reader of such a work thus gets a possibility to immerse into the world created by the author’s imagination”.<sup>5</sup> But it is important to be careful here, because this imaginative world, unrealistic “otherworlds” and escape from reality could also be associated with the genre of sci-fi literature. It is therefore necessary to explain the differences between sci-fi and fantasy. Fantasy, unlike sci-fi, is not based

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<sup>3</sup> CLUDE, J., GRANT, J. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. UK: Orbit Books. 1997. P. 338.

<sup>4</sup> HERMAN, D., JAHN, M., RYAN, M. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. 1st edition. Routledge. 2005. P. 160.

<sup>5</sup> VANČO, M. *Fenomén Harry Potter v recepčných súradniciach*. Nitra: Enigma, 2009.

on technology, future development and rational speculation. Fantasy is “sentimental and fairytale-like with roots in the past (pseudohistory) and instead of technology, it concentrates on magic and mysticism”.<sup>6</sup>

According to Mocná, there are three main possibilities of how to create the imaginative world. The first option is to create a fully imaginative world. The next type is a parallel between the real world and the “otherworld”, and the last option is an entrance into the pseudo history of our world. The fictional world has its own rules that are often in conflict with the rules of the ordinary world as we know it.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the definitions stated above, it would seem easy to claim that fantasy is something completely unreal and non-existent. But that is not entirely true. In fact, as Herman claims, there are realistic elements in fantasy: even though the story takes place in an “otherworld”, its characters, their actions and behaviour can be generally seen as completely real.<sup>8</sup> When thinking about Harry Potter, this proves to be true. Although most of the time the storyline of Harry Potter is set into a world of magic and fantastic objects and beasts, it cannot be forgotten that Harry’s magical world is a part of the real world, with all the real and ordinary problems. Not only does he have to deal with a great dark wizard or with his attempts to learn magic, he also faces problems that are very well known to his readers – family trouble, love or fear.

As it has been said, it is rather difficult to classify Harry Potter into a suitable literary context. Anne Hiebert Alton claims that one of the major appeals of the books “lies in Rowling’s incorporation of a vast number of genres”. She further states that:

*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* suggests fantasy, magic and myth, while elements of mystery or even horror are evoked by *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* sounds like a racy thriller, and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* carries the medieval connotations of chivalry and knighthood along with the promise of hope and rebirth, while the mystery implicit in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* not only raises questions of identity but also picks up on one of the troubling sub-texts of the series by invoking the contrasts between the muggle and wizard worlds. Finally, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* has connotations of not only gothic tale but also the sense of deadly mystery.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> MOCNÁ, D. *Encyklopedie literárních žánrů*. Litomyšl: Paseka. 2004. P. 188. ISBN 80-7185-669-X.

<sup>7</sup> MOCNÁ, D. *Encyklopedie literárních žánrů*. Litomyšl: Paseka. 2004. P. 188. ISBN 80-7185-669-X.

<sup>8</sup> HERMAN, D., JAHN, M., RYAN, M. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. 1st edition. Routledge. 2005. P. 161.

<sup>9</sup> ALTON, A. H. *Playing the Genre Game: Generic Fusions of the Harry Potter Series*. In Heilman, E. E. *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge. 2009. P. 199-200.

These claims may be true, but it is clear from the citation that each book of the series belongs within a different genre. It is therefore necessary to take into account what is common for all of the books. Although each of them belongs to a slightly different genre, all still take place in the background of fantasy. The following examples support the claim that it is fantasy that is the main genre of Harry Potter novels.

The thing that must be mentioned first, is the concept of “otherworld”. As mentioned earlier, the genre of fantasy creates an alternative world and according to Mocná and her division into three dimensions, Harry Potter’s story takes place in a world parallel to ours.<sup>10</sup> The world of ordinary people, who do not know magic, is referred to as “the world of muggles” and its opposite is, obviously, the world of wizards and witches. These two worlds are not separated but, in fact, in many ways intertwine. From the very first pages of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* the reader can witness for example a cat reading a map or people dressed in weird cloaks that a “normal person” would never wear. It is true that the beginning of the story is a little special; the wizards celebrate and then do not try that hard to stay hidden from the muggles. Even though the wizards usually stay hidden from muggles, they are still part of their world. Sometimes it is mentioned in the books that muggles realize there is something weird or different going on, but usually they find a reasonable explanation for it and do not think about it anymore because they simply do not believe in magic. But in most of the times, mainly in order not to disturb the muggles, the wizards use means of magic so that the muggles would not find them. This is explained in the next example taken from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, where Harry is brought to a house which serves as a seat of a secret organization, “The Order of the Phoenix”:

They were standing outside number eleven; he looked to the left and saw number ten; to the right, however, was number thirteen. ‘But where’s --?’ ‘Think about what you’ve just memorised,’ said Lupin quietly. Harry thought, and no sooner had he reached the part about number twelve, Grimmauld Place, than a battered door emerged out of nowhere between numbers eleven and thirteen, followed swiftly by dirty walls and grimy windows. It was as though an extra house had inflated, pushing those on either side out of its way. Harry gaped at it. The stereo in number eleven thudded on. Apparently the muggles inside hadn’t felt anything.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> MOCNÁ, D. *Encyklopedie literárních žánrů*. Litomyšl: Paseka. 2004. P. 188. ISBN 80-7185-669-X.

<sup>11</sup> ROWLING, J. K.. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. P. 58. ISBN 0 7475 5100 6.

The quotation talks about the house at Grimmauld Place in London which is located in a muggle neighbourhood but is protected by a charm, so that it stays hidden from the local muggles or other intruders. The quotation clearly illustrates how close the wizard and muggle worlds are, but still, they are so far away, proven by the fact that the muggle neighbours did not even notice that a whole house just grew next to theirs.

Another necessary part of the “otherworld” is made up by magic, extraordinary creatures or supernatural objects. Harry encounters countless number of these in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which he attends since the age of eleven. The castle itself is a supernatural place and offers many other fantastic elements, such as talking armours, plants with magical properties or unprecedented creatures who are partly a creation of the author's imagination, for example a patronus or a dementor, and partly derived from mythology, such as a dragon, a goblin or a three-headed dog.

Therefore, it is clear that Rowling's work meets the general characteristics of the fantasy genre and can therefore be included among fantasy books. Many argue that *Harry Potter* is more of a children's story, this view is not entirely untrue, but it is clear that the characteristics of fantasy genre are closer to Rowling's work. It also needs to be said that *Harry Potter* does not strictly belong to one genre. As it was stated earlier, each of the seven books has its own features of different genres, such as a fairy tale, a mystery, a thriller and sometimes also a detective story or even a horror. All of this is, however, placed in the fantasy background, as it was stated above.

When talking about those many genres interweaving through the septology, it is important to put Rowling's work into literary context, not just from the genre point of view. J. K. Rowling was born in 1965 and has shown interest in literature since her early childhood. At the age of six, she wrote a story for her younger sister.<sup>12</sup> Her interest in literature has persisted to adult age although it was not until the 1990s when *Harry Potter* has seen the light. *Harry Potter* is definitely not the first story Rowling has ever made up but it is certainly the first one that gained a worldwide success. Being a new, unknown author, Rowling faced several problems when addressing publishers. But finally, the Bloomsbury publishing group took interest in her book and things started to move. Practically overnight, from a poor, single mother, Rowling became a world known successful author who is nowadays very often compared to other modern fantasy authors,

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<sup>12</sup> SMITH, S. *Sen jménem Harry Potter*. Euromedia Group, 2002. P. 20. ISBN 80-242-0849-0.

such as Tolkien, Dahl or Lewis.<sup>13</sup> Rowling herself claims that she have never favoured fantasy literature<sup>14</sup> and therefore did not intend to set her story in such background. In his interview for BBC, Terry Pratchett tried to defend this claim by saying, that “Ever since The Lord of the Rings revitalised the genre, writers have played with it, reinvented it, subverted it and bent it to their times.”<sup>15</sup> and thus the boundaries of the genre can be pretty vague. Whether she intended or not to write a fantasy story, as it was proved earlier in this chapter, Harry Potter shows many features crucial for fantasy genre and therefore there is no doubt that it belongs within. The story of a young wizard fighting the evil powers has seen an incredible success since its first release and considering information given above, it is highly likely that it gained its success by taking what is best and most interesting of several literary genres mentioned by Anne Hiebert Alton in a citation on page 11, and putting it together in the background of a very successful genre of fantasy.

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<sup>13</sup> PENNINGTON, J. From Elfland to Hogwarts, or the Aesthetic Trouble with Harry Potter. P. 78. (full entry in bibliography)

<sup>14</sup> ROWLING, J.K. J.K.Rowling: By the Book. New York Times [online]. 2012. [cit. 2014-6-18]. (full entry in bibliography)

<sup>15</sup> PRATCHETT, T. Pratchett takes swipe at Rowling. *Sunday Times*. 2005. [cit. 2014-6-18]. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4732385.stm>

## 2 THE GENRE OF MYTHOLOGY

Modern literature in general is very much influenced by the world mythology. Especially the genre of modern fantasy, according to Dickerson and O'Hara, is actually not that modern at all. Fantasy is quite young as a genre, but on closer inspection it is clear that this genre inspires in much older genres, such as romance or myths or traditional fairy tales. As they claim:

However, modern fantasy literature, especially the deeper and better kind, is steeped and rooted in ancient myth, medieval heroic legend, and fairy tale. To put it differently, 'modern fantasy' – by which we mean the fantasy literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, or more specifically fantasy in the post - J. R. R. Tolkien era – is in many ways not so modern! If we follow the thinking of Tolkien, myth, fairy tale, romance and fantasy can and ought to be understood as different aspects of the same category: what Tolkien calls *Faërie*. Thus, any exploration of modern fantasy should by rights begin with a study of its predecessors.<sup>16</sup>

It is thus in order, in connection with the series of Harry Potter, to deal with the world's mythology, or its narrower selection, which had the greatest impact on the creation of this saga. Nevertheless, at the beginning, it is important to look closer at the genre of mythology in general terms, on what a myth actually is, where it came from and what its role in modern literature is. According to Britannica, a myth is:

...a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience.<sup>17</sup>

Almost every culture in the world lived, at a certain time, from mythology. It helped to develop the nation throughout the centuries and, before science existed, it was mythology that answered people's existential questions and taught them about the origins of the world and the laws of nature. This statement is also supported by Helma Marx, who states that myths are the archaic

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<sup>16</sup> DICKERSON, M., O'HARA, D. *From Homer to Harry Potter*. MI: Brazor Press. 2007. P. 16. ISBN 978-1-58743-133-3.

<sup>17</sup> *Myth*. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Cit. 06-11-2013 [online]. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400920/myth>

way of interpreting the world and its meaning, in times before science. The Greek word “myein” means “to talk mysteriously” or “to speak to power”. Myth thus includes what, in old cultures, was known only to the shamans, priests or kings. These “insiders” then reported the information about the origin of the world, answering the existential question to other, in fact, ordinary people.<sup>18</sup>

Marx also notes that an important feature of mythology is a division of the world into two separate areas:

On the one hand, the area of what we hold empirically, meaning everything we see or touch or what we generally perceive through the senses. Second area then includes everything you expect behind the knowable world, everything that happens without being seen.<sup>19</sup>

This is supported by Karen Armstrong stating basically the same thing that “mythology talks about another level that exists alongside our world and that, in a certain sense, supports it. Belief in the unseen, but fuller reality, sometimes called the world of the gods, is the main subject of myths.”<sup>20</sup> But also, as Armstrong further states, mythology and gods meant some sort of secular affairs. The existence of gods was inseparable from the existence of storms, seas or even strong human emotions like love, anger or sexual passion, which, for a moment, picked one up to another level of existence, so that they could see the world from a new perspective.<sup>21</sup>

Nowadays, we use the word “myth” to refer to something completely unrealistic, something that surely never happened. In modern history, we started to search only for facts, but in the ancient world, people looked more for the meaning of events and affairs, and that was exactly the role of myths in their lives. In pre-modern world, mythology was indispensable. It helped one to find his sense of life, but also revealed the human spirit, that would otherwise remain hidden. It was a form of psychology. Even Freud and Jung, as Armstrong mentions, explained their views on the soul on the basis of classical mythology and gave it all a new meaning.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> MARXOVÁ, H. *Svět mýtů*. Praha 8: Volbox Globator. 2002. P. 508. ISBN 80-7207-461-X.

<sup>19</sup> MARXOVÁ, H. *Svět mýtů*. Praha 8: Volbox Globator. 2002. P. 509. ISBN 80-7207-461-X.

<sup>20</sup> ARMSTRONGOVÁ, K. *Krátká historie mýtu*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition. Praga: Argo. 2006. P. 10. ISBN 80-7203-750-1. (my translation)

<sup>21</sup> ARMSTRONGOVÁ, K. *Krátká historie mýtu*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition. Praga: Argo. 2006. P. 11. ISBN 80-7203-750-1. (my translation)

<sup>22</sup> ARMSTRONGOVÁ, K. *Krátká historie mýtu*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition. Praga: Argo. 2006. P. 16. ISBN 80-7203-750-1. (my translation)



From the quotations mentioned above, it is very clear that J. K. Rowling took her inspiration in the very basic principles of mythology, as she presents two co-existing worlds side by side. On one side, it is the world as we know it, the world of muggles. On the other side, it is the world of wizards and witches. The muggle world stands, according to Marx's theory, for the empirical world that can be perceived through senses, whereas the world of wizards is hidden and muggles have no idea about its existence even though, in fact, this world affects them and in some way influences their lives.

This is perfectly described in *The Half-Blood Prince* in the first chapter (The Other Minister), where the Prime minister of Great Britain is visited by the Minister of Magic and he finds out that his assistant is actually a wizard and that wizards are in control of the present situation and the "real" ministry is not in charge at all.

"Difficult to know where to begin," muttered Fudge, pulling up the chair, sitting down, and placing his green bowler upon his knees. "What a week, what a week..."

"Had a bad one too, have you?" asked the Prime Minister stiffly, hoping to convey by this that he had quite enough on his plate already without any extra helpings from Fudge. [...]

"I've been having the same week you have, Prime Minister. The Brockdale Bridge...the Bones and Vance murders...not to mention the ruckus in the West Country..."

"You — er — your — I mean to say, some of your people were — were involved in those — those things, were they?"

Fudge fixed the Prime Minister with a rather stern look. "Of course they were," he said.<sup>23</sup>

As Rowling says further, the Prime Minister did not appreciate "being made to feel like an ignorant schoolboy".<sup>24</sup> That exactly supports Marx's interpretation of myth as something known only to a certain sort of people who then postpone the knowledge to other, ordinary, people.

As it can be seen from the information above, mythology, even though considered something very old, nearly as old as the world itself, still survives and influences our way of perceiving the world. Throughout the centuries, mythology moved from a scientific position to more of a philosophical position. At the beginning, it clearly superseded science – it explained to people the laws of physics or nature. Just consider for example the Greek gods of Olympus who are often nothing different than mere personifications of natural phenomena such as storms, tides, and others. But over time, mythology moved to a philosophical level. It answers existential questions

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<sup>23</sup> ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 2005. P 10. ISBN 0 7475 8108 8.

<sup>24</sup> ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 2005. P 10. ISBN 0 7475 8108 8.

- who we are and where we come from or where we are going further, after we leave this world. No matter how mythology is perceived in the current world, one thing is still certain. In today's world, mythology still has its unique place and many people turn to it for inspiration, such as J. K. Rowling did during creating one of the most successful stories in modern literature.

Clearly, due to its long time of existence and huge complexity, this paper is not going to deal with mythology as a whole but only two of the world mythologies are chosen to be described, as these influenced Rowling during her writing of the series the most. First of the chosen ones was the mythology of the Celts, as it is connected with Potter mainly geographically, and the other one is Greek mythology, as this one is the most known all over the world and provided Rowling with the largest amount of inspiration.

### **3 CELTIC MYTHOLOGY**

One of the most significant mythologies that influenced the world of Harry Potter is the Celtic mythology. The Celts inhabited a great part of the European continent, and it would be impossible to include all the Celtic myths. Therefore, only those appearing on the British Isles are dealt with. Some features of the Celtic myths can be found in other mythologies, too, but they may not be as significant as they are for the Celts. Even though it cannot be said with certainty, that those features were taken by Rowling directly from Celtic myths, they occur in the mythology of the British Isles and for the Celts, they had a tremendous impact.

Many books were written on the issue of the Celtic mythology, and many writers tried to reveal the secrets of old Celtic myths. The main aim of this paper is to take a look under the hood of Celtic mythology and its rituals, traditions and other features that inspired Rowling so much that she decided to revive them in her series about a young, brave wizard. The purpose is mainly to show that Rowling took her inspiration from old, classical stories and sometimes only gave them different setting or changed the names. The Celtic heritage is so rich that there is a huge number of creatures, rituals, used properties and many more things that Rowling included in her books. Thanks to Harry Potter, the Celtic myths come to life again and enjoy the great favour among readers who can, even today, in modern times, find explanations and answers to existential questions of life, often without realizing it directly. One of the aims of this paper is to prove that there is a clear linkage between the old Celtic myths and legends and the stories of Harry Potter.

As it has been said, there are many sources dealing with the Celtic myths and traditions. It is necessary, therefore, to clearly define particular myths that are going to be dealt with. The Celts, during their evolution, used to inhabit a great part of the European continent, mainly the middle and the western part and, of course, the British Isles. This paper will focus mainly on the legends from the British Isles, as the Harry Potter saga takes place on the British Isles, too. Another reason is that the British Isles are separated from the rest of Europe and in the past, when the myths circulated only in oral form, the British Celts were not influenced by other world mythologies, as Matthews states:

The insular Celts of the British Isles, particularly of Ireland, remained relatively undisturbed by other cultures far longer than the other European Celts. They thus retained traditions longer than their European relatives.<sup>25</sup>

The main sources which this paper draws from are then Irish and Welsh mythology. In general, the Celtic mythology can be divided into three main parts: “The Goidelic, including Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the western highlands of Scotland, The Insular Brythonic, including Wales and Cornwall, and The Continental Brythonic, including Brittany”<sup>26</sup>

The main similarity between Celtic mythology and J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter is the presence of magic. What magic actually is and what role it plays in the mythology and the Potter series follows:

Magic (sorcery), art of influencing the course of events or gaining knowledge by supernatural means. Magic is linked to alchemy, occultism, spiritualism, superstition, and witchcraft. The term is derived from the ancient Persian magi, whose priestly occupations included dealing with the occult. The ancient Greeks and Romans also practiced magic. According to anthropologists, magical beliefs and practices exist in most less-sophisticated cultures. Moreover, magical beliefs and practices, such as fortune-telling, communication with the dead, astrology, and belief in lucky numbers and charms, survive even in the most advanced cultures.<sup>27</sup>

As it is clear, the presence of magic is not a feature occurring only in Celtic mythology; in fact, it is probably the most common mythological feature in world mythologies in general. What is important is the significance that Celts paid to magic and what role it played in their society. Magic was really crucial in the Celtic myths. But why is that? At the beginning, it is necessary to realize what was mentioned above – the myths often referred to powers of nature, and explained natural causes before science could have done it, therefore, the Celts considered it magical because of the lack of knowledge and logical explanations.

The same case can be observed very well in the books about Harry Potter. Even before Harry learns that his parents were wizards, and therefore he has magical abilities too, certain things happen to him that he cannot rationally explain:

The problem was, strange things often happened around Harry. [...]

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<sup>25</sup> MATTHEWS, C. *The Celtic Tradition*. Dorset: Element Books Limited, 1995. P. 6.

<sup>26</sup> LINDEMANS, M.F. Celtic mythology. In *Encyclopedia Mythica* [online]. 2013 [cit. 2014-01-21]. Available at: <http://www.pantheon.org/areas/mythology/europe/celtic/celtic.html>

<sup>27</sup> *Magic*. Encarta Encyclopedia. CD-ROM. Microsoft Corporation, 2001.

Once, Aunt Petunia [...] had taken a pair of kitchen scissors and cut his hair so short he was almost bald except for his fringe, which she left “to hide that horrible scar.” [...] Next morning, however, he had gotten up to find his hair exactly as it had been before Aunt Petunia had sheared it off. [...]

Another time, Aunt Petunia had been trying to force him into a revolting old sweater of Dudley’s. The harder she tried to pull it over his head, the smaller it seemed to become, until finally it might have fitted a hand puppet, but certainly wouldn’t fit Harry.<sup>28</sup>

Harry did not wish for his powers, he did not even know that such a thing as magic really exists. He was just a kid gifted with these magical powers and until he was explained, he – as other muggles – thought that he only experienced several miraculous accidents. But later, we learn that Harry belongs to the “gifted” ones that possess the ability to perform magic. In Celtic myths not everybody was able to do magic. Every village or group of people had their Druid who represented the magical power given by nature. This person was able to understand the symbols from nature and use them to benefit of the whole village. According to Matthews, Druids were members of the *aos dana*, the people of art, and were also said to have magical abilities. They were bonesetters, astrologers, teachers, poets, judges and prophets as well.<sup>29</sup> There is a clear parallel to the Harry Potter world in muggles, being the ordinary villagers, and wizards, who represent the ability to perform magic.

That is not the only similarity to the Celtic ways in explaining magic. As a child, Harry is naturally prone to believe that something like magic really exists, and what is more, that he is able to control it. That, however, cannot be said about adult muggles, looking for anything logical and rational to explain anything that is currently happening. They, therefore, do not think about existence of magic for even a slight moment and attribute all to natural phenomena. Rowling illustrates this fact via the weatherman in the news at the very beginning of the first book:

I don’t know about that, but it’s not only the owls that have been acting oddly today. Viewers as far apart as Kent, Yorkshire, and Dundee have been phoning in to tell me that instead of the rain I promised yesterday, they’ve had a downpour of shooting stars! Perhaps people have been celebrating Bonfire Night early.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> ROWLING, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 23. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

<sup>29</sup> MATTHEWS, C. *The Celtic Tradition*. Dorset: Element Books Limited, 1995. P. 40.

<sup>30</sup> ROWLING, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 10. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

Not only did the muggles mistake the joyous magical celebrations of Voldemort's fall for shooting stars, but - since even shooting stars did not seem too likely - they even came with another rational explanation, and that was an early Bonfire Night, in other words, a different phenomenon caused by the hand of another human. Thus, we see clearly what is stated above, namely that the people due to lack of knowledge, or simply because rejecting certain facts, always look for an easier and more bearable explanation.

Myths are important even from the psychological point of view. As McCoy says, C. G. Jung explained in his works that "myths are based on imagination and dreams which represent unconscious processes of mind and thus become a powerful tool in our deep inner changes and development".<sup>31</sup> This is then the explanation why humans need myths in their lives. One simply cannot live without having dreams, and the mythological gods and heroes serve as archetypes in people's minds. Magical rituals are then seen as something brought from another dimension where all our dreams can come true. Rowling demonstrates this main principle in Harry Potter by including a large number of magical spells, objects and also rituals. Rowling in her books also demonstrates people's need to believe in something. That is also a significant feature in Celtic mythology. People tend to believe in something unrealistic, but very often, it is represented by some kinds of talismans. Marx mentions that in connection with Celtic magical objects that were supposed to have magical power. Animal teeth or tails were very often used as these magical objects but sometimes people created them also from feathers or furs. The creation itself meant a kind of a ritual.<sup>32</sup> Talismans are also an issue in Harry Potter world:

Meanwhile, behind the teachers' backs, a roaring trade with talismans, amulets, and other protective devices was sweeping the school. Neville Longbottom bought a large, evil-smelling green onion, a pointed purple crystal, and a rotting newt-tail before the other Gryffindor boys pointed out that he was in no danger: he was a pure-blood, and therefore unlikely to be attacked.<sup>33</sup>

As it is clear, talismans in the fictional wizarding world have the same or at least very similar purposes as they do have in Celtic mythology. Usually it is to protect the talisman's owner from something evil happening to them. Such rituals and objects are going to be dealt with in the second part of the thesis.

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<sup>31</sup> McCoy, Edain. *Celtic Myth & Magick*. Trans. Jana Novotná. Praha: Volvox Globator, 1999. P. 18.

<sup>32</sup> MARXOVÁ, H. *Svět mýtů*. Praha 8: Volvox Globator. 2002. P. 138. ISBN 80-7207-461-X.

<sup>33</sup> ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1998. ISBN 0 7475 4960 5.

## 4 GREEK MYTHOLOGY

As the Greek mythology is probably the best known throughout the world, a great trace of the Greek myths can be found in the series. That is why the Greek mythology is also going to be dealt with in this thesis. As the Greek mythology is still nowadays an integral part of western culture, it is almost entirely certain that its influence on Rowling when writing Harry Potter was huge. As it is with the Celtic myths, the task of the thesis is to reveal the Greek myths hidden in this series of books about Harry Potter.

The mythology of the ancient Greeks included a large number of deities, demigods, monsters, and heroes. These figures inhabited a realm that stretched beyond the Greek landscape to the gods' palaces on the Mount Olympus, as well as to the Underworld. Although these characters had some undoubtedly amazing powers, in many stories, they are described as ordinary people with human characteristics, often trying to fit among the human beings. That is very similar in Harry Potter. Wizards are described as ordinary people, only they have some special and rare abilities, in this case, to control magic. In Greek mythology, we very often meet with a god interacting with humans but it is not always with a good result for both sides. Because of their powers, gods came to the opinion that they are superior to humans, as they can influence their lives. On the other hand, humans often asked gods for help, probably because it was an easier solution to their trouble than to try anything else. An example can be found in Petiška's *Staré řecké báje a pověsti*, in the legend of Orpheus: Orpheus falls in love with a nymph Eurydice, but she is bitten by a snake and dies. Orpheus cannot accept her death and goes to the Underworld to seek Hades and asks him for help. Hades agrees to bring Eurydice back to life, but he has a condition. Orpheus fails to fulfil this condition; therefore, Eurydice stays dead forever.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the result of events was the same, only a supernatural character was involved, only to remind readers clearly that this supernatural being has the power to change the fate of an ordinary man.

In *The Deathly Hallows*, similar tendencies can be traced. Throughout the series, Albus Dumbledore is described as a muggle supporter and someone who claims that muggle-born wizards are nothing less than the pure-bloods and that muggles are equal to wizards. Sometimes he is even reproached for being so "pro-muggle", especially by those who consider their pure blood a priority, in this case, Draco Malfoy:

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<sup>34</sup> PETIŠKA, E. *Staré řecké báje a pověsti*. Praha: Ottovo nakladatelství. 2013. P.19-23. ISBN 80-7360-489-2.

I suppose Dumbledore's trying to hush it all up. He'll be sacked if it doesn't stop soon. Father's always said Dumbledore's the worst thing that's ever happened to this place. He loves Muggle-borns. A decent Headmaster would never've let slime like that Creevey in.<sup>35</sup>

However, in the very last book, the reader is told differently. It is a shocking revelation, but at some point of the story, Harry and Hermione learn about ideas and intentions of the young version of their hero. In *The Philosopher's Stone*, it is said that Albus Dumbledore's greatest victory was over a dark wizard named Grindelwald.<sup>36</sup> But seven years later, Harry finds out that Dumbledore and Grindelwald used to be best friends and that they contrived a plan to dominance of wizards. As Albus explains in his letter to Grindelwald:

Your point about Wizard dominance being FOR THE MUGGLES' OWN GOOD --- this, I think, is the crucial point. Yes, we have been given power and, yes, that power gives us the right to rule, but it also gives us responsibilities over the ruled. We must stress this point, it will be the foundation stone upon which we build.<sup>37</sup>

Even someone as noble as Dumbledore once had the desire for power; he wanted to be admired and appreciated for his powers and abilities – as the Greek gods liked to be worshipped and thus often meddled in humans' lives claiming that it was for the humans' own good. Powell in his review mentions Lefkowitz's "observations about the pre-eminence of Zeus and his almighty will, and how the gods behave in a rather haphazard way toward mortals, whose fate is to suffer".<sup>38</sup> There is a certain parallel between Dumbledore and Grindelwald's wish to become superior to muggles, as the Gods were to mortals. Dumbledore and Grindelwald did not explicitly want muggles to suffer but it is clear that they felt superior to them, as they had powers the muggles did not.

As Burn (1999, p. 101) supports the statement of interaction between gods and humans, Greeks, in fact, did not put myths in some separate areas of life. Mythological characters and stories incorporated into Greek society and were included and reflected in all social events from the

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<sup>35</sup> ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1998. P 242. ISBN 0 7475 4960 5.

<sup>36</sup>J. K. ROWLING, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 77. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

<sup>37</sup> ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2007. P. 291. ISBN 978 0 7475 9106 1.

<sup>38</sup> POWELL, B.B. *The Gods in Myth*. The classical review [online]. Cambridge University Press, 2004, vol. 54 [cit. 2014-03-04]. P. 432. ISSN 14643561



cradle to the grave. Extant evidence also suggests that mythology was a natural and accepted part of life, which operated simultaneously on several different levels. The stories were a source of popular entertainment, and what they expressed, became the inspiration for the musical, poetic and artistic works that made the world of ancient Greece famous. Myths also rendered inexhaustible supply of examples – of both good and bad behaviour for instructing the youth, but also examples of how fate, destiny and character works, and examples touching the mystery of life over which the elderly contemplated.<sup>39</sup>

Burn continues to explain why all civilizations need mythology to set the basis of the values and traditions:

Mythology is needed by all civilizations, and many of them made their own. Because, however, the Greek civilization makes the basis of the western society and the study of Greek culture was until recently a very important part of the educational system of the western world, many of western societies have adopted the Greek myths as their own and use them in addition to their own legends, both current and historical.<sup>40</sup> (my translation)

Also, according to Marx (2002, p. 65), with the advent of philosophy, myths began to be told more in allegories, they inspired many poets and writers, and a large number of them became a European cultural heritage. Some of them even survive in Christianity.<sup>41</sup> According to these two authors, it is therefore clear that Greek mythology is still a part of our life and general knowledge in the contemporary world. Maybe that's why many of us do not realize the amount of links and references that appear in Rowling's work. For example something so typical for Harry, his scar in a shape of a lightning bolt could actually be a reference to Zeus, the god of sky and thunder whose symbol is a lightning bolt. As Rowling describes Harry's scar:

Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep. Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning.<sup>42</sup>

There is even more to that: as Dommermuth-Gudrich states, Zeus's father, Cronus, feared that one of his children would overthrow him, as Cronus himself had become the Master of the Universe by overthrowing his father, Uranus. Cronus was so afraid that he intended to eat all his

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<sup>39</sup> BURNOVÁ, L. *Řecké mýty*. Nakladatelství Lidové noviny. 1999. P. 101. ISBN 80-7106-220-0

<sup>40</sup> See 42, p. 102.

<sup>41</sup> MARXOVÁ, H. *Svět mýtů*. Praha 8: Volbox Globator. 2002. P. 65. ISBN 80-7207-461-X.

<sup>42</sup> ROWLING, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 16. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9

children. But instead of Zeus, his wife gave him a rock in diapers and let Zeus grow up away from his father. In the end, Zeus really did overthrow his father.<sup>43</sup>

Although Voldemort is not Harry's father, there is a certain parallel to that story. There is a strong reason why Dumbledore wanted Harry to grow up away from the wizarding world, although the Dursleys were not the best family he could imagine for Harry. Besides, there were many wizard families who would gladly take him as their own son, as Dumbledore admits in *The Order of the Phoenix*.<sup>44</sup> But finally, after five years, Harry gets an answer to his most pressing question – why does Voldemort actually want to kill him? Here, the parallel with Zeus can be found. As Harry learns, there was a prophecy and on the basis of this prophecy, Voldemort decides to destroy Harry earlier than he could ever become a threat. The prophecy states that a child “with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches [...] and the Dark Lord will mark him as equal”.<sup>45</sup> As it turns out, this child did not have to explicitly mean Harry Potter. Therefore, Voldemort creates his own enemy who, in the end, wins over him, same as Zeus did win over his father Cronus.

That is only a fraction of the many similarities between Harry Potter series of books and the stories of Greek mythology. In the following chapters, a deeper look will be taken into magical creatures, symbols and rituals that took inspiration from the most known Greek myths.

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<sup>43</sup> DOMMEMUTH-GUDRICH. *Nejznámější mýty*. Praha: Slovart. 2002. P. 61. ISBN 80-7209-579-X.

<sup>44</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. P. 736. ISBN 0 7475 5100 6.

<sup>45</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. P. 741. ISBN 0 7475 5100 6.

## 5 CELTIC MYTHS IN HARRY POTTER

This chapter summarizes the characters, supernatural beings, symbols and rituals appearing in the Harry Potter books, specifically those that have a demonstrable origin in Celtic myths and legends. The chapter will discuss individual samples of primary and secondary sources; these will be analyzed and compared, thereby the influence of mythology on J. K. Rowling while creating the Harry Potter saga will be proven. .

At the beginning it is reasonable to mention the key structural elements of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. These elements are the wizards themselves. In Celtic mythology, the incidence of people with magical abilities is not unique; therefore the first mentioning rightfully belongs to none else but wizards.

The most famous wizard of Celtic mythology is undoubtedly Merlin, Welsh druid, poet and sage. According to Vlčková, Merlin's destiny was as follows:

Powers of Darkness decided to destroy the world of humans, and therefore wanted to bring the Antichrist to the world, ie the son of an innocent virgin, and the Devil himself. For this purpose a king's daughter was chosen, whose family was destroyed first. The desperate and unhappy princess sought refuge in a convent, where she was found and tricked by the Devil after all. The plan was therefore fulfilled and the princess got pregnant. But when a child - a boy – was born, he was immediately baptized by the princess's confessor named Merlin. This partly marred the evil plans, but the boy remained magical abilities, that he learned to use beneficially.<sup>46</sup> (my translation)

As it is confirmed by Colbert, Merlin was one of the wisest wizards ever. At some point in his life, he was an adviser to the famous king Arthur. He actually may have been based on a true living wizard, but the one this paper talks about was created from fantastic legends. Colbert goes on about Merlin:

He is best known as King Arthur's mentor. In a noteworthy parallel, he hid the infant Arthur just as Dumbledore knew to hide Harry from Voldemort. [...] Merlin then became both Arthur's tutor and his counsellor, using his keen intelligence and innumerable acts of wizardry to help the young king fight Britain's enemies.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> VLČKOVÁ, J. *Encyklopedie keltské mytologie*. Praha: Libri. 2002. P. 224. ISBN 80-7277-066-7.

<sup>47</sup> COLBERT, D. *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group. 2008. P. 259-261. ISBN 978-0-425-22318-5.

In the quotation mentioned above, Colbert highlights the main reason why Merlin is mentioned in this thesis. His resemblance to the character of Albus Dumbledore is highly considerable. According to Rowling, Dumbledore is “the greatest wizard of modern times, particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon’s blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel”.<sup>48</sup> For Harry he has a similar function, just as Merlin had for King Arthur. He is a keen protector, a mentor in Harry’s studies, personal life, and especially in the difficult role of being “the chosen one”, whose task is to protect the wizarding world before re-joining the Dark Lord, Lord Voldemort.

Merlin is also a prime example of another issue that Rowling has in common with Celtic myths. This issue is the purity of origin, or a Blood Status, as it is called in the saga. In Harry Potter, it is presented that for some, not all witches and wizards are equal. As Ron explains to Hermione:

There are some wizards — like Malfoy’s family — who think they’re better than everyone else because they’re what people call pure-blood. [...] I mean, the rest of us know it doesn’t make any difference at all. Look at Neville Longbottom — he’s pure-blood and he can hardly stand a cauldron the right way up. [...] Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn’t married Muggles we’d’ve died out.<sup>49</sup>

The Blood Status is determined according to the level of magically-endowed members. It often results in prejudice towards those who have a large number of muggles in their families. Basically, the determination is as follows:

- A wizard is of a pure origin, meaning that both his parents come from traditional wizarding families (with none or minimum of muggles).
- Another option is so-called "half-blood", which means that one of the parents comes from a wizarding family and the other parent is of muggle origin.
- The third option is a child born to parents who are not able to perform any magic and at a certain age, the child starts to have magical abilities. Usually, such a magician is called "muggle-born", but some wizards who honour only the pure-blood (as above mentioned Draco Malfoy) call those people "Mudbloods".

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<sup>48</sup> ROWLING, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 77. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9

<sup>49</sup> ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1998. P. 127-128. ISBN 0 7475 4960 5.

The irony is that many of the best wizards come from nothing else but a muggle family. Harry's classmate Hermione Granger is a great example of the third option. Hermione has no wizards in her family tree, yet she is the best student in Harry's class.

The wise Albus Dumbledore supports Ron's claim that the Blood Status does not matter at all in modern days. As he said to the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge:

You place too much importance, and you always have done, on the so-called purity of blood! You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!<sup>50</sup>

There are many examples to this claim. One already mentioned is Hermione Granger, born to a family with no magical skills and becoming a successful student and an extraordinary Witch. On the other hand, there is Lord Voldemort, who himself is "just" a half-blood although he stubbornly gives privileges exclusively to the pure-blood wizards and witches and becomes one of the most evil and feared dark wizard of all time. A similarity can be spotted in the above mentioned story about Merlin. He, himself, was a child of evil, the Devil himself but he used his powers to do well. As Vlčková outlines Merlin's life story:

[...] Merlin, however, revealed to the king the true cause of instability of the fortifications. Under the foundations of the building, there was an underground lake and two dragons lying on its bottom. Every time they moved, they caused an earthquake and the fall of the tower. The king did exactly as Merlin's advised and the tower was completed successfully. King made Merlin, though he was still a child, his mentor. After the death of King Vortigern, Merlin wisely and successfully helped Ambrosio, Uther Pendragon and also Arthur, whose birth he has contributed to.<sup>51</sup> (my translation)

Not only that Albus Dumbledore possesses character qualities very similar to those that are typical for the great wizard Merlin, but Merlin's fate and characteristics also represent the general view on wizards and witches and their powers in relation to their origin. Whether Rowling created Dumbledore's character similar to Merlin on purpose or not, there are undoubtedly some features that can be found very alike.

Another important character occurring in Harry Potter is Harry's absolutely faithful and loyal friend, a house-elf called Dobby. Dobby is the very first representative of the creatures called

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<sup>50</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P. 614. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X.

<sup>51</sup> VLČKOVÁ, J. *Encyklopedie keltské mytologie*. Praha: Libri. 2002. P. 224. ISBN 80-7277-066-7.

house-elves that are described in Harry Potter, and according to Rowling his physical appearance is as follows:

The little creature on the bed had large, bat-like ears and bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls. [...] The creature slipped off the bed and bowed so low that the end of its long, thin nose touched the carpet. Harry noticed that it was wearing what looked like an old pillowcase, with rips for arm and leg holes.<sup>52</sup>

Later, it is explained that Dobby wears that pillowcase as a symbol of his enslavement – he cannot get anything else to wear because giving a house-elf something to wear means setting him free.

Across all seven books, there are several mentions of Dobby. At first, Harry does not think that it could ever be beneficial to have Dobby around. That is mainly because of Dobby's attempts to keep Harry away from Hogwarts by causing various "accidents" to him. As opposed to this assumption, in the end of *The Chamber of Secrets* it is revealed that everything Dobby conducted was only in good faith and desire to help. That is why Harry decides to help him, too and tricks Dobby's owner, Lucius Malfoy, into giving Dobby a piece of clothing.<sup>53</sup> Dobby never forgets this favour and keenly helps Harry. For example in *The Goblet of Fire*, Dobby gives Harry the gillyweed to survive in the Great Lake in order to save Ron and fulfil the second task of the Triwizard Tournament.<sup>54</sup> Another example is in *The Order of the Phoenix* when Dobby helps to find a secret place where Harry could teach the members of Dumbledore's Army how to defend against the Dark Arts.<sup>55</sup> However, the most important role of Dobby comes in the last book, *The Deathly Hallows* – Dobby literally saves Harry's life when he appears in the Malfoy Manor and helps Harry and his friends escape from death. Sadly, he pays for this with his own life.<sup>56</sup> This event only shows the loyalty he bears toward Harry.

As for the behaviour of house-elves, it is usual that they are happy to serve someone for free. They are taught to do as their masters tell them to:

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<sup>52</sup> ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1998. P. 18. ISBN 0 7475 4960 5.

<sup>53</sup> ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1998. P. 362. ISBN 0 7475 4960 5.

<sup>54</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P. 426. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X.

<sup>55</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. P. 343. ISBN 0 7475 5100 6.

<sup>56</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2007. P. 385. ISBN 978 0 7475 9106 1.

“House-elves is not paid, sir! No, no, no.” [...] “House-elves is not supposed to have fun, Harry Potter,” said Winky firmly, from behind her hands. “House-elves does what they is told. I is not liking heights at all, Harry Potter,” – she glanced towards the edge of the box and gulped – “but my master sends me to the Top Box and I comes, sir.”<sup>57</sup>

Not only that a house-elf has to obey his master’s order but if he fails to do so, he has to punish himself. It is not just about the elf’s will, there is magic behind it. If master orders something, the elf is not physically able to act differently. The proof of this is given to Harry when he inherited the house-elf Kreacher after the death of his godfather, Sirius:

“Give him an order,” said Dumbledore. “If he has passed into your ownership, he will have to obey.” [...]

“Won’t, won’t, won’t, WON’T!” Kreacher’s voice had risen to a scream. Harry could think of nothing to say, except, “Kreacher, shut up!”

It looked for a moment as though Kreacher was going to choke. He grabbed his throat, his mouth still working furiously, his eyes bulging. After a few seconds of frantic gulping, he threw himself face forwards on to the carpet and beat the floor with his hands and feet, giving himself over to a violent, but entirely silent, tantrum.<sup>58</sup>

House-elves have many mutual characteristics with the so-called brownies appearing in Celtic traditional tales. Kronzeks describe brownies as good-natured manikins whose job is to help people to take care of their household. They are supposed to do so at night, in order not to disturb the house owners and not to be a nuisance to them. Kronzeks also emphasize one specific feature to the house-elves. Once a brownie is offered a payment for his job, he disappears and never comes back again.<sup>59</sup>

Not much distant from house-elves in physical appearance are other magical creatures, goblins. In Harry Potter, the only goblins presented are the Gringotts who own and run a magical bank where wizards and witches keep their fortune. As the Gringotts are closely connected to gold, they can be compared to an old Irish myth about Lepreuchans. Kalweit describes Lepreuchans as small, mischievous creatures who like gold and agree to help someone only at a guarantee of a good pay.<sup>60</sup> The Gringotts very carefully take care of their assets. As Hagrid explains to Harry the

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<sup>57</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P. 90. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X.

<sup>58</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 2005. P. 54- 55. ISBN 0 7475 8108 8.

<sup>59</sup> KRONZEK, A. Z. and E. *The Sorcerer’s Companion: A Guide to the Magical World of Harry Potter*. Praha: Rybka Publishers, 2002. P. 60. ISBN 80-86182-59-2.

<sup>60</sup> KALWEIT, H. *Keltská kniha mrtvých*. Praha: Eminent. 2003. P. 228. ISBN 80-7281-132-0.

first time they meet, “Gringotts is the safest place in the world for anything yeh want ter keep safe — ‘cept maybe Hogwarts.”<sup>61</sup> Everyone shall be discouraged from attempting to steal anything from Gringotts by a warning sign by their entrance door:

Enter, stranger, but take heed  
Of what awaits the sin of greed,  
For those who take, but do not earn,  
Must pay most dearly in their turn.  
So if you seek beneath our floors  
A treasure that was never yours,  
Thief, you have been warned, beware  
Of finding more than treasure there.<sup>62</sup>

In accordance to keeping their clients’ money safe, they have it hidden deep under the ground, and one can reach their vault only using a special trolley driven by one of the Gringotts’ goblins. This feature of the bank can be related to Kalweit’s note that it is usual for a Lepreuchan to have his pot of gold hidden under the ground.<sup>63</sup>

As for the magical creatures, one of the world-wide most famous would definitely be a dragon. Colbert quotes a material from about the age 600 A.D. when dragons were taken very seriously:

The dragon is the largest of all serpents and of all living things upon earth. It has a small face and a narrow blow holes through which it draws its breath and thrusts out its tongue. [...] And it has its strength not in its teeth but in its tail, and it is dangerous for its stroke rather than for its jaws. It is harmless in the way of poison, but poison it is not necessary for it to cause death, because it kills whatever it has entangled in its folds.<sup>64</sup>

In Harry Potter, the fact that dragons are a part of the fantastic world, is revealed in the beginning of *The Philosopher’s Stone*, when Hagrid tells Harry that vaults at Gringotts are guarded by dragons. Then, he admits: “Crikey, I’d like a dragon. [...] Wanted one ever since I was a kid.”<sup>65</sup> At some point in Harry’s first year at school, he meets a live dragon face to face, although it is just a

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<sup>61</sup> ROWLING, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 50. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

<sup>62</sup> ROWLING, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 56-57. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

<sup>63</sup> KALWEIT, H. *Keltská kniha mrtvých*. Praha: Eminent. 2003. P. 228. ISBN 80-7281-132-0.

<sup>64</sup> COLBERT, D. *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group. 2008. P. 72. ISBN 978-0-425-22318-5.

<sup>65</sup> ROWLING, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 52. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9



young one. It is in *The Goblet of Fire*, where Harry encounters with an adult dragon, too. During the Triwizard Tournament, he must steal a golden egg from one. This is how Rowling describes dragons:

Four fully grown, enormous, vicious-looking dragons were rearing on their hind legs inside an enclosure fenced with thick planks of wood, roaring and snorting — torrents of fire were shooting into the dark sky from their open, fanged mouths, fifty feet above the ground on their outstretched necks. There was a silvery-blue one with long, pointed horns, snapping and snarling at the wizards on the ground; a smooth-scaled green one, which was writhing and stamping with all its might; a red one with an odd fringe of fine gold spikes around its face, which was shooting mushroom-shaped fire clouds into the air; and a gigantic black one, more lizard-like than the others, which was nearest to them.<sup>66</sup>

It is then very easy to see why the dragon was the most feared beast. Charlie Weasley, the dragon keeper states that the Hungarian Horntail dragon is “a vicious thing and its back end is as dangerous as its front”.<sup>67</sup> While preparing for the task, Harry tries to find out a technique to defeat the dragon, but he only learns that “dragons are extremely difficult to slay, owing to the ancient magic that imbues their thick hides, which none but the most powerful spells can penetrate...”<sup>68</sup> This seems to be confirmed by the legend of St. George, the patron of England, who once slaughtered a dragon. Colbert cites the Faerie Queen, a poem about this slaughter:

And over all with brazen scales was armed, like plated coat of steel, that nothing could pierce it, nor could his body be harmed with dint of sword, nor push of pointed spear.<sup>69</sup>

Not surprisingly, the descriptions from legends and the one by Rowling are very much alike. It has been said earlier that dragons belong among the most famous mythological creatures; consequently Rowling does not vary too much from the well-known description.

The most significant symbol in Celtic mythology would probably be a cauldron. In the Harry Potter saga, cauldrons are important enough to be required for all the first-year students, and also valuable enough for Mundungus Fletcher to want to sell them. According to Colbert, cauldrons

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<sup>66</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P. 286. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X.

<sup>67</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P. 288. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X..

<sup>68</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P. 296. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X..

<sup>69</sup> COLBERT, D. *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group. 2008. P. 74. ISBN 978-0-425-22318-5.

are more rooted in myths and history than flying broomsticks.<sup>70</sup> For Celts, it was not only an object used for cooking. As Vlčková explains, not only the gods, but also kings could not do without a cauldron. In a king's dining hall, a large fireplace with a cauldron above it held the most honourable place. In Celtic legends, the cauldron is a symbol of hospitality and livelihood.<sup>71</sup> She also further mentions a Welsh legend of Bran, the king of Britain who got a gift from Irish people. The gift was the Cauldron of Rebirth, and warriors could be reborn in this cauldron:

They threw the corpses of warriors into the cauldron until it was full. The very next day, those warriors would come out of the cauldron equally good and strong as they were before death, except for the fact that they were not able to speak.<sup>72</sup> (my translation)

A cauldron with the same magical power to revive the dead is mentioned by Kalweit in the legend of Pwyll, the king of the Otherworld:

Bran owned a cauldron that revived the dead, Ceridwen's cauldron provided inspiration. Tuatha de Dannan also owned a cauldron; then there was Dagda's cauldron, which was something like a horn of plenty, always full. However, only one cauldron existed, one being...Cauldron is also a symbol of resurrection. Fallen warriors are thrown in it, so that they jump out of it the next day – in the world of the dead, in the Ceridwen's cauldron that contains omnipotent elixir of intelligentsia. Meat or body that simmers in it, will return to its pre-material state.<sup>73</sup> (my translation)

According to these definitions from legends, a cauldron is, in fact, symbol of life and death. Everything ends in it, but it can also see a new beginning. Without doubt, there is a parallel between this story and the story of Voldemort's rebirth in *The Goblet of Fire*. Harry is being held at the graveyard, and he watches Voldemort's servant, Wormtail, to prepare a resurrection bath for his master.

Wormtail's fast, wheezy breathing was growing louder again. It sounded as though he was forcing something heavy across the ground. Then he came back within Harry's range of vision, and Harry saw him pushing a stone cauldron to the foot of the grave. It was full of what seemed to be water - Harry could hear it splashing around - and it was larger than any cauldron Harry had ever used; a great stone belly large enough for a full-grown man to sit in.

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<sup>70</sup> COLBERT, D. *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group. 2008. P. 51. ISBN 978-0-425-22318-5.

<sup>71</sup> VLČKOVÁ, J. *Encyklopedie keltské mytologie*. Praha: Libri. 2002. P. 152-153. ISBN 80-7277-066-7.

<sup>72</sup> VLČKOVÁ, J. *Encyklopedie keltské mytologie*. Praha: Libri. 2002. P. 153. ISBN 80-7277-066-7.

<sup>73</sup> KALWEIT, H. *Keltská kniha mrtvých*. Praha: Eminent. 2003. P. 90. ISBN 80-7281-132-0.

[...] And then Wormtail lowered the creature into the cauldron; there was a hiss, and it vanished below the surface; Harry heard its frail body hit the bottom with a soft thud.<sup>74</sup>

Then Wormtail adds more ingredients to the cauldron, making a commentary about each of them – he is performing a typical magical ritual, a horrifying one. For the whole time, Harry hopes something goes wrong, but...:

A surge of white steam billowed thickly from the cauldron instead, obliterating everything in front of Harry, so that he couldn't see Wormtail or Cedric or anything but vapor hanging in the air... [...] But then, through the mist in front of him, he saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron.<sup>75</sup>

Like the Welsh warriors from the legend, Voldemort, too, rises anew from a magical cauldron that gave him a new strong body and the ability to perform magic on his own again.

Another noticeable feature in Harry Potter is the interest in talking heads – and talking heads are not meant figuratively. In Harry Potter, at the Hogwarts castle and also other places, such as the Ministry of Magic, St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries or just ordinary households of wizarding families, moving and talking portraits can be found. In the institutions listed above, there is a tradition of hanging paintings of former employees or somehow famous members of the wizarding society. The portraits in the wizarding world are not just ordinary paintings of people, but it is a means of preserving the person's character. People in portraits in the Harry Potter's world can talk, move and also travel among their other portraits at different places.

Harry first sees a moving picture in the Hogwarts Express on his first way to school:

Harry turned the card back over and saw, to his astonishment, that Dumbledore's face had disappeared.  
"He's gone!"  
"Well, you can't expect him to hang around all day," said Ron. "He'll be back. [...]"  
"But in, you know, in the muggle world, people just stay put in photos."  
"Do they? What, they don't move at all?" Ron sounded amazed. "*Weird!*"  
Harry stared as Dumbledore sidled back into the picture on his card and gave him a small smile.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P. 555-556. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X.

<sup>75</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P. 557-558. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X.

<sup>76</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 77. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

Some portraits are only moving but silent and some can talk. This is special particularly for the above mentioned famous wizards and witches. The portraits have this feature mainly so that the dead characters would be able to provide their successors with advice or help.

In Celtic mythology, the cult of heads can be observed, too. According to Vlčková, Celts decorated their homes with heads of their exceptional ancestors, and also with the heads of their enemies:

They embalmed the heads and kept them in cabinets and boxes so they could brag to their guests and visitors. Each head meant a heroic story that magnified the glory of the owner and strengthened the bond with the family. All perhaps resulted primarily from the Celtic belief that the human genius resides in head, and it does not leave it even after death but, on the contrary, can be used to protect the owner and strengthen his combat capabilities, health and sexual potential.<sup>77</sup> (my translation)

The fact that Celts were convinced that heads of their ancestors or enemies can be beneficial in any way might have had an impact on Rowling when she searched for some means of communication between the living and the dead. Again, as it has been said earlier, Rowling in her writing sometimes omitted those details that are rather drastic and too naturalistic. After all, her book is supposed to be read mainly by children and these scary little things might frighten them and discourage them from reading.

It is more than clear that Rowling is familiar with traditional tales of Celtic mythology and let herself take a deep inspiration from them. There are many more creatures and characters that resemble some of those well-known from the Harry Potter saga, but those mentioned above are typical and the most clear examples of the Celtic myths and legends reflected in the books.

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<sup>77</sup> VLČKOVÁ, J. *Encyklopedie keltské mytologie*. Praha: Libri. 2002. P. 160-161. ISBN 80-7277-066-7.

## 6 GREEK MYTHS IN HARRY POTTER

Earlier in the thesis, it is stated that modern European culture partially took the old Greek myths and legends as its own. Thus it is sure that the impact of Greek myths on Harry Potter may be even more visible than the impact of Celtic mythology. There is no doubt that in Europe, the original Greek legends are known to most of the population, hence many readers would probably be able to spot the individual mythological stories behind Harry Potter themselves. Same as it is in the previous chapter, the most popular and visible examples of characters, supernatural beings, symbols and rituals appearing in Greek myths will be discussed in this part of the thesis.

The first mention of the elements of Greek mythology in Harry Potter is still intertwined with the previous chapter. There is one feature mutual to both Celtic and Greek mythology, and that is the art of transfiguration. In Harry Potter, some wizards and witches are able to take a form of another creature or object. Usually they transform into an animal, for example as Professor McGonagall does:

Dumbledore [...] sat down on the wall next to the cat. He didn't look at it, but after a moment he spoke to it.  
"Fancy seeing you here, Professor McGonagall."  
He turned to smile at the tabby, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses exactly the shape of the markings the cat had had around its eyes.<sup>78</sup>

There are some more examples among the wizards known to Harry, who are so-called Animagi, meaning that they can, as explained above, change their physical appearance into an animal. However, it is not very common in the world of Harry Potter because the Ministry of Magic keeps track of them, as Hermione explains:

We did Animagi in class with Professor McGonagall. And I looked them up when I did my homework — the Ministry of Magic keeps tabs on witches and wizards who can become animals; there's a register showing what animal they become, and their markings and things...<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 13. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

<sup>79</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1999. P. 351. ISBN 0-439-13635-0.

It means that every wizard that is an Animagus is able to transform into one animal, and that animal must be described in the Ministry's registry. That is an important difference as opposed to the myths and legends where magicians or gods were able to transform freely into whatever they desired. In Celtic legends, this ability is represented by famous magician Merlin while duelling with another sorcerer, Madame Mim:

At first gong, Madame Mim immediately turned herself into a dragon. It was an accepted opening move and Merlyn ought to have replied by being a thunderstorm or something like that. Instead, he caused a great deal of preliminary confusion by becoming a field mouse [...] and nibbled Madame Mim's tail. [...] But when she did notice the nibbling, she was a furious cat in two flicks.<sup>80</sup>

The description of the battle goes on and on. Both sorcerers are taking various forms – a dog, a bird, an oak, etc, when suddenly, Madame Mim in a form of aullay started choking, turned red, rolled her eyes and fell dead on the ground. Merlin changed himself into microbes of a disease and killed his opponent.

In Greek myths, it was for example Zeus who was able to take various forms. Once, he kidnapped Europa while transformed into a bull.<sup>81</sup> Another time, according to a different story, while transformed into a stallion, he spawned a son - a centaur. In the same story, it is stated that the same ability was known also to Zeus's father, Cronus – he once transformed into a horse and gave a life to the famous wise centaur mentioned above – Chiron.<sup>82</sup> According to Colbert, Poseidon's servant, Proteus was also able to quickly transform into a variety of animals so that he could hide away from people because they constantly bothered him and wanted him to predict the future.<sup>83</sup>

Same as it is in Celtic myths, if one is capable of changing his physical form, he can do it freely and as he wishes. As mentioned above, in Harry Potter, that is not possible. In this case, Rowling only uses a typical ability of magical-gifted characters and integrates it differently in her own story.

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<sup>80</sup> COLBERT, D. *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group. 2008. P. 25. ISBN 978-0-425-22318-5.

<sup>81</sup> KERÉNYI, K. *Mytologie Řeků II*. Praha: OIKOYMENH. 1998. P. 27. ISBN 80-89005-00-3

<sup>82</sup> KERÉNYI, K. *Mytologie Řeků II*. Praha: OIKOYMENH. 1998. P. 175. ISBN 80-89005-00-3

<sup>83</sup> COLBERT, D. *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group. 2008. P. 23. ISBN 978-0-425-22318-5.

One of the most famous creatures of Greek myths is a centaur. It is a mythical beast with the legs and body of a horse, but it has a human torso and a human head. The additional book to the stories of Harry Potter, *Fantastic Beast and Where to Find Them*, also states that the centaurs prefer to live alone, away from people, regardless of whether these people are wizards or muggles.<sup>84</sup> According to Greek mythology, there are records of battles between humans and centaurs that ended badly for the centaurs; therefore it is no wonder why centaurs in general try to avoid encounters with humans.

Not all centaurs, however, feel the need to shun and avoid people. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, the students meet a centaur named Firenze. Albus Dumbledore seeks a Divination teacher after professor Umbridge fires Sybil Trelawney for failing to meet the criteria of the job. Firenze seems a suitable candidate as the centaurs are able to predict the future from the stars. Firenze agrees to join the board of professors at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which, however, costs him his place in the centaur herd.

“I would have preferred to teach you in the Forbidden Forest, which was — until Monday — my home ... but that is no longer possible. [...] I cannot return to the Forest. My herd has banished me.”

“Please, sir ... why have the other centaurs banished you?”

“Because I have agreed to work for Professor Dumbledore,” said Firenze. “They see this as a betrayal of our kind.”<sup>85</sup>

In a Greek legend, there is a similar character to Firenze. The name of his Greek counterpart is Chiron who is an educated centaur and also teaches others his skills. Kerényi provides an example of Chiron’s mentoring, where he was in charge of the famous Achilles:

Thus Achilles became invulnerable, except the heel, where his mother held him. But then she left her almost immortal son anyway. Peleus then brought the boy to Chiron’s cavern and the centaur fed him entrails of lions and boars and bear marrow. At the age of six, Achilles was able to hunt wildlife. He also owes Chiron for his simple manners, and from him he also learned the art of medicine. It was also believed that Achilles also learned to play the string musical instruments thanks to Chiron.<sup>86</sup> (my translation)

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<sup>84</sup> ROWLINGOVÁ, J.K. *Fantastická zvířata a kde je najít*. Praha: Albatros. 2002. P. 45. ISBN 80-00-01020-8.

<sup>85</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. P. 530. ISBN 0 7475 5100 6.

<sup>86</sup> KERÉNYI, K. *Mytologie Řeků II*. Praha: OIKOYMENH. 1998. P. 233. ISBN 80-89005-00-3.

In other Greek legends, at least according to Kerényi, Chiron is considered the wisest and most educated of all centaurs.<sup>87</sup> In Harry Potter, centaurs are considered wise in general. They should also be treated with respect because they hold the same attitude towards humans.<sup>88</sup> Rowling mentions this in *Fantastic Beast and Where to Find Them* and according to the legends interpreted by Kerényi, centaurs have always enjoyed great respect in the society. In the case of centaurs, Rowling's attitude to the original myths seems similar to the case of dragons – both dragons and centaurs are well-known and famous creatures, hence there is not much space for changing of the basic characteristics of these species.

Another character is not as far away from the centaurs as it could seem. Hogwarts professor, Sybil Trelawney, Firenze's predecessor, who taught Divination at the school for several years, also has her equivalent in Greek myths. Although with this one, Rowling made a greater effort to make this myth actually hidden. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, it is revealed that professor Sibyl Trelawney is a descendant of a famous Seer, Cassandra Trelawney. She is said to be the first one since her time to have the gift of second sight.

“And you are a great-great-granddaughter of the celebrated Seer Cassandra Trelawney?”

“Yes,” said Professor Trelawney, holding her head a little higher. [...]

“But I think — correct me if I am mistaken — that you are the first in your family since Cassandra to be possessed of Second Sight?”

“These things often skip — eh — three generations,” said Professor Trelawney.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the famous ancestor in her family tree, professor Trelawney is not considered very trustworthy in her field. Dumbledore himself admits that when he first met Sybil Trelawney, his opinion of her was not really tremendous:

I had gone there to see an applicant for the post of Divination teacher [...] The applicant, however, was the great-great-granddaughter of a very famous, very gifted Seer, and I thought it common politeness to meet her. I was disappointed. It seemed to me that she had not a trace of the gift herself. I told her, courteously I hope, that I did not think she would be suitable for the post.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> KERÉNYI, K. *Mytologie Řeků II*. Praha: OIKOYMENH. 1998. P. 112, 185. ISBN 80-89005-00-3.

<sup>88</sup> ROWLINGOVÁ, J.K. *Fantastická zvířata a kde je najít*. Praha: Albatros. 2002. P. 45. ISBN 80-00-01020-8.

<sup>89</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. P. 281. ISBN 0 7475 5100 6.

<sup>90</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. P. 740. ISBN 0 7475 5100 6.



At this point in the story, Sibyl found herself in a kind of a trance and said the memorable prophecy that Harry and Voldemort will have to fight in combat one day, since neither of them can live, if the other survives. This persuaded Dumbledore to reconsider his decision, and Sybil was hired to teach at Hogwarts. Although this case and the one from *The Prisoner of Azkaban* where a similar situation occurs and professor Trelawney, in trance, predicts the return of Lord Voldemort with the help of his former servant<sup>91</sup>, are the only cases of a real prophecy made by her.

Rowling probably adopted the above mentioned untrustworthiness of professor Trelawney from the namesake of Sybil's great-great-grandmother, Cassandra. Burn and Kerényi concur in the description of the story of Cassandra from Greek mythology. Burn only mentions that Cassandra had a prophetic gift, but she was destined not to be ever believed.<sup>92</sup> Kerényi adds more to that story by claiming that Cassandra owed Apollo for her gift. Apollo promised to award her with the gift of divination, in return for her love toward him. Cassandra agreed, but then changed her mind and betrayed Apollo took vengeance on her by arranging that her prophecies were never taken seriously.<sup>93</sup>

As it has already been mentioned, Rowling drew from many of the Greek myths. The well-known myths are usually left without any significant changes, but from lesser-known myths, she used only some parts and then variously combined them and adjusted them to her needs in the story.

One of the most memorable creatures for Harry Potter fans would probably be Fluffy, Hagrid's beloved monstrous three-headed dog who helped to guard the Philosopher's Stone in the first book:

They were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog, a dog that filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering in their direction; three drooling mouths, saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1999. P. 324. ISBN 0-439-13635-0.

<sup>92</sup> BURNOVÁ, L. *Řecké mýty*. Nakladatelství Lidové noviny. 1999. P. 53-54. ISBN 80-7106-220-0.

<sup>93</sup> KERÉNYI, K. *Mytologie Řeků II*. Praha: OIKOYMENH. 1998. P. 231. ISBN 80-89005-00-3.

<sup>94</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 119. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

The origin of Fluffy can be traced to Greece – both actual Fluffy and its original Greek version, too. Rowling suggests Fluffy’s Greek origin via Hagrid’s mouth when Hagrid says that he “bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the pub las' year”.<sup>95</sup> In Greek myths, there is a guardian dog named Cerberus, and it guards the entrance to the Underworld, i.e. the realm of the dead. There are more stories where Cerberus played a role. However, all these stories have several common features: Cerberus is always described as a giant dog with multiple heads. Kerényi states that the number of heads varied from three to fifty.<sup>96</sup> Marx adds that besides his terrifying heads, it did not have regular dog fur, but instead, his fur was composed of a large number of snakes.<sup>97</sup> Rowling probably decided to omit this feature to make Fluffy more pet-like for Hagrid. It is not only the physical appearance that Fluffy and Cerberus have in common. For every beast there is a guaranteed way to tame it. For Cerberus, music did the task:

Confident with his lyre, Orpheus embarked on the dark path to the Underworld, where besides him, only a few living humans have ever walked. [...] The boatman Charon even got out of his boat and walked behind Orpheus to listen to the unheard singing. When Orpheus sang, Cerberus did not make a single bark.<sup>98</sup> (my translation)

Exactly the same trick works for Fluffy as well. Hagrid accidentally reveals the secret to taming Fluffy to Harry and his friends, and as a result, they realize that Hagrid revealed it to somebody else earlier – a stranger who sold him the dragon egg:

He asked a bit about the sorta creatures I took after. [...] He had ter be sure I could handle it. [...] So I told him, after Fluffy, a dragon would be easy... [...] So I told him, Fluffy’s a piece o’ cake if yeh know how to calm him down, jus’ play him a bit o’ music an’ he’ll go straight off ter sleep —<sup>99</sup>

This would be another great example of Rowling borrowing a mythological story and putting it in the background of the Harry Potter saga. As it seems from the individual descriptions, the only repeating pattern of Rowling’s editing of the original stories is making them more fairytale-like. Rowling must have had in mind that her story is meant mainly for children; therefore, she omitted the scariest parts of the original Greek myths.

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<sup>95</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 14. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

<sup>96</sup> KERÉNYI, K. *Mytologie Řeků II*. Praha: OIKOYMENH. 1998. P. 134. ISBN 80-89005-00-3.

<sup>97</sup> MARXOVÁ, H. *Svět mýtů*. Praha 8: Volbox Globator. 2002. P. 88. ISBN 80-7207-461-X.

<sup>98</sup> MARXOVÁ, H. *Svět mýtů*. Praha 8: Volbox Globator. 2002. P. 208. ISBN 80-7207-461-X.

<sup>99</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997. P. 193-194. ISBN 978 0 7475 7360 9.

The Greek legend of Minotaur, a monster with human body and bull's head, belongs amongst the most famous all over the world. According to the legend, Minotaur was a son of Pasiphae, the wife of the Cretan king Minos, and a rare white bull. For the monster that emerged from this affair, it was not possible to live among people. Therefore king Minos asked the famous architect Daedalus to build a labyrinth where he intended to have Minotaur imprisoned. A Greek hero, Theseus, had to go into this labyrinth and fight Minotaur. In order not to get lost in the maze, he uses a ball of threads which he fastens at the entrance to the maze and unwinds it on his way inside. Then, he is able to find his way back by following the thread.<sup>100</sup>

In *The Goblet of Fire*, there is a maze as well, but Harry uses magic to get him through the labyrinth successfully. The labyrinth is a third task in the Triwizard Tournament where Harry participates. At first sight, Harry's maze is different from the one Theseus went into. The main difference lies in the fact that according to the rules of the Triwizard Tournament, a kind of prize waited for Harry in the center of the maze, but Theseus could have found death at the centre of the labyrinth, since it was not certain that he would win the fight with Minotaur.

On a second thought, the labyrinth at Crete and the one at Hogwarts do not differ that much after all. What waited for Harry at the end of his struggles in the maze, after he grabbed the desired Triwizard Cup, could hardly be called a reward:

He and Cedric both grasped a handle.

Instantly, Harry felt a jerk somewhere behind his navel. His feet had left the ground. He could not unclench the hand holding the Triwizard Cup; it was pulling him onwards, in a howl of wind and swirling color, Cedric at his side. [...]

"Did anyone tell *you* the Cup was a Portkey?" Cedric asked.<sup>101</sup>

The Portkey takes the boys to a graveyard in a village called Little Hangleton, and there, Harry has to witness Lord Voldemort to be re-born again and to get a whole new – scarier – body of flesh and bones. Later, he eventually has to fight him. Luckily, Harry manages to escape and survives. After all, the resemblance of the stories about a labyrinth seems very large. Both Harry and Theseus have to fight for their lives after a difficult journey through the maze. Sadly, as opposed to Theseus, Harry is not able to kill his newly reborn nemesis, Lord Voldemort.

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<sup>100</sup> BURNOVÁ, L. *Řecké mýty*. Nakladatelství Lidové noviny. 1999. P. 36. ISBN 80-7106-220-0.

<sup>101</sup> ROWLING, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000. P.551-552. ISBN 0 7475 4624 X.

Although the actual fight between Harry and Voldemort does not take place in the labyrinth itself, Harry still has to get through the pitfalls that the labyrinth prepares for him. He loses track of his location, encounters many magical creatures that block his way, etc. As mentioned above, unlike Theseus, Harry can use magic to keep going in the right direction.

There is enough mythological material to go on for several more pages. Many characters in Rowling's story were inspired somewhere else, whether it was in original British legends, which is definitely the closest source of inspiration, as the story takes place on the British isles, or in the famous Greek myths, whose features directly encourage to their use because often, they are very similar to fairy tales and therefore are amazingly suitable for Rowling's purposes of the story. Educative motive can be found here as well – the history and myths are still a part of common knowledge, and thanks to Rowling, many children find it now more amusing and attractive to study and learn.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The aim of the thesis was to point out the similarities in J. K. Rowling's work and traditional mythological tales of Celtic and Greek mythology. Rowling quite clearly drew on these stories and made them again a little more immortal.

It may seem that nowadays values are no longer based on the same grounds than they were before. Today's youth draws their knowledge primarily from modern science and technology, and traditional myths seem to be a minority. Rowling, however, found a very casual way, which is a source of entertainment and amusement for young people, to revive the original mythological stories so that they again came to the attention of the youth.

Even though we might not know it, traditional mythological values still survive in our society. In Harry Potter, the reader is presented a traditional hero. Although Harry is only a little kid, he represents character qualities of the greatest heroes of the old world myths. He is brave and unselfish. After all he has gone through, he still believes that there are good people in the world, and for their sake, he is willing to sacrifice his own life. Countless mythological heroes were endowed with these qualities, for example Greek Perseus who valiantly fought the scary Medusa and used his wit to defeat her. It could be, after all, compared to Harry fighting the basilisk on *The Chamber of Secrets*. Medusa can be, in fact, considered a source of inspiration for the basilisk, as everyone who looks her in the face, turns into a stone immediately.<sup>102</sup> The same happens to several students in *The Chamber of Secrets*, including one of Harry's best friends, Hermione Granger. But still, only a twelve-year-old Harry puts his own fears aside and saves his friends while facing Voldemort himself.

Harry's bravery is not the only thing taken from the original myths. A great deal is made from the perception of the world nowadays. There is no physical or scientific proof, but many people still like to believe that there are some supernatural powers that are in fact in charge of the ordinary people. As it is stated, in Harry Potter world, the ordinary people, muggles, do not know about the existence of wizards because they are not willing to consider them true. It is very similar to our society, people usually believe in "something", but they are too down-to-earth to attach greater importance to it. In the myths, it seems to be very similar, yet more extensive. Because of the undeveloped science in the ancient times, people believed more in the powers of nature and

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<sup>102</sup> BURNOVÁ, L. *Řecké mýty*. Nakladatelství Lidové noviny. 1999. P. 87-88. ISBN 80-7106-220-0.

gave them far greater importance than we do nowadays. As it is stated earlier, the tendency prevails in peoples' minds, they just do not seem to pay attention to it.

The thesis aimed to prove that myths influenced Rowling while creating the whole Potter world where all the magic happens. According to the analyzed extract and pieces of mythological stories, it is more than certain that myths greatly inspired Rowling's journey of making a whole new magical world where many children like to escape.

## 8 RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá zkoumáním podobností mezi keltskou a řeckou mytologií a příbězích o mladém čarodějnickém učni Harry Potterovi. Mýtus je klasickým literárním žánrem, jeho kořeny sahají hluboko do historie lidstva, a přestože se to může zdát nemožné, v různých podobách přetrvává dodnes, stále patří mezi oblíbené žánry a modrení autoři z mýtů nadále čerpají inspiraci.

V první řadě se práce snaží o prokázání toho, že Harry Potter by měl být právoplatně zařazen do žánru moderního fantasy. Mnozí tvrdí, že příběh je spíše dětskou pohádkou, najde se i mnoho odpůrců knihy, kteří ji nepovažují za dostatečně hodnotnou pro dospělé čtenáře a rádi by ji zcela přenechaly dětem. Ze zjištěných skutečností však vyplývá, že Harry Potter má s fantasy literaturou společného mnohem více, než s tradičními pohádkami. Příběh je především velice komplexní a rozsáhlý. Vše souvisí se vším, má svůj význam a dané místo. Rowlingová se velice snažila o to, aby byl příběh spletitý, a jednotlivé skutečnosti jsou odhalovány postupně, mnohdy i po značně dlouhé době. Nezřídka je možné si všimnout, že autorka poskytuje vysvětlení k ději až o několik let později, v některé z dalších knih, a velice dlouhou dobu není čtenáři znám pravý důvod patálií, kterými si mladý Harry prochází. Příkladem může být například fakt, že již v první knize se Harry utká se svým nepřítelem, Lordem Voldemortem, avšak až v knize páté je odhalen skutečný motiv této nevraživosti. Naproti tomu pohádky obvykle vedou od jedné skutečnosti přímo ke druhé, motiv činů postav je vždy jasně zřejmý. Ze srovnání žánru fantasy a pohádky v úvodu práce jasně plyne, že Harry Potter je skutečně dílem moderní fantasy literatury, ačkoli čerpá z něčeho tak tradičního, jako je mytologie.

Přestože se může na první pohled zdát, že tradiční světové mýty a moderní fantasy mají jen pramálo společného, opak je pravdou. Mytologie patřila, a do jisté míry stále patří, mezi všeobecné znalosti a je součástí obecného povědomí napříč celým světem. V dřívějších dobách lidé čerpali z mytologických příběhů životní moudrost a zkušenosti. Ačkoli v dnešní době čerpáme znalosti především z vědy a moderních technologií a mýty se zdají být poněkud upozaděny, v literatuře hrají stále dost významnou roli. Harry Potter je případem, kdy autor vytvoří příběh zasazený do moderního světa, ale právě použitím prvků mytologie mu dodá na jisté „kouzelnosti“ a navíc tak dokáže nenásilnou formou připomenout čtenářům tradiční hodnoty uznávané v mytologických příbězích, na něž již v dnešní době není kladen takový důraz.

Zvolení keltské a řecké mytologie pro porovnání s dílem J. K. Rowlingové nebylo náhodné. Řecká mytologie do dnešní doby patří mezi světově nejznámější a řada autorů z ní čerpá inspiraci. Rowlingová našla snadnou cestu, jak moderní mládeži připomenout tradiční příběhy řecké mytologie, dokázala je mistrně začlenit do svého nově vytvořeného prostředí školy čar a kouzel v Bradavicích a s noblesou jí vlastní servírovala svým čtenářům mnoho tradičních mýtů pouze oděných v novém kabátě. Čtenář se tak může s dobře známými draky, kentaury, tříhlavým psem, jenž plní funkci strážce, a dalšími bytostmi objevujícími se v tradičních řeckých mýtech. V případě klasických řeckých příběhů se Rowlingová zaměřila především na postavy a nadpřirozené bytosti, které se zde objevují. Tyto bytosti jsou natolik známé, že čtenář jejich přítomnost jediné uvítá, díky nim se pak celý příběh zdá o něco bližší, než kompletně nový svět, ke kterému čtenář zatím nemá vybudovaný vztah.

V případě keltské mytologie nešlo tolik o to, že by byla dobře známá a jen byla čtenářům Harryho Pottera připomínána. Minimálně ne těm v různých částech světa, mimo Velkou Británii, kde tyto mýty stále přežívají. Zde se jedná spíše o spojení geografické, jelikož se příběh o Harry Potterovi odehrává na Britských ostrovech, a ty jsou domovem většiny keltských mýtů. Rowlingová, jakožto rodilá Angličanka, má k tradičním keltským mýtům bezpochyby blízký vztah, a z toho důvodu se mnohdy nechala inspirovat právě jimi. Na rozdíl od řecké mytologie, ze které Rowlingová čerpala především bytosti a postavy, keltská mytologie se v Harry Potterovi odráží spíše v podobě tradic, rituálů či symbolů. Samotnou podstatu světa Harryho Pottera, a to osoby obdařené kouzelnými schopnostmi, můžeme nalézt právě v keltských mýtech. Jak je v práci zmíněno, typickým zástupcem mága s takovými schopnostmi byl v keltských mýtech čaroděj Merlin, který se vyznačoval řadou vlastností, jež mají kouzelníci a čarodějky právě v příbězích o Harry Potterovi. Pro Kelty byla magie obecně velmi důležitá, často přikládali magické schopnosti i na první pohled obyčejným předmětům. Nejlepším příkladem takového předmětu je například zmiňovaný kotlík, který měl v keltských mýtech hluboký význam, nešlo o pouhou nádobu na přípravu jídla, ale o symbol hojnosti a zajištěnosti. I v Harry Potterovi se tento symbol objevuje v důležitých momentech příběhu. Pro čaroděje je součástí základního vybavení, bez kterého nemohou ve škole studovat. Mimo to je kotlík i velmi důležitým prvkem při znovuzrození Harryho úhlavního nepřítele, Lorda Voldemorta, jehož nový příchod mezi živé je velmi podobný irské legendě o znovuzrozených válečnících, kteří byli mrtví vyhazováni do kotle a na druhý den z něj vystupovali živí a plní sil. Keltská víra v posmrtný život se celkově v Harry



Potterovi odráží velice silně. Napříč všemi sedmi knihami se setkáváme s duchy, s obrazy zemřelých kouzelníků, kteří hovoří s těmi žijícími, a dokonce i s možností návratu ze světa mrtvých, který ale není nejšťastnějším řešením.

Na základě této práce je tedy více než jisté, že Rowlingová se nechala bohatě inspirovat tradičními mytologickými příběhy a nakládala s nimi různým způsobem. Některé pouze zasadila do prostředí svých příběhů a ponechala je bez výraznějších změn – takto byli například draci či tříhlavý pes Chloupek nebo domácí skřítkové vyobrazení věrně podle svých předloh. V příběhu o kouzelnickém učni plnili stejnou či velmi podobnou roli jako v mýtech, které jim daly vzniknout. S jinými mýty pracovala Rowlingová důkladněji, použila je pouze okrajově a jako náznaky jistých podobných okolností. Takto byla například použita postava vědmy Cassandry Trelawneyové, jež se v příběhu objevuje jen ve zmínce a zprostředkovaně skrze jiné postavy. Význam má přesto hluboký a rovněž věrně vystihuje podstatu své předlohy, věštkyně Kassandry z řeckých mýtů.

Texty použité napříč celou prací tedy jasně ukazují, že Rowlingová použila mýty jako silný zdroj inspirace a neusilovala o to, aby se její nově vytvořené skutečnosti či postavy staly nesmrtelnými. Spíše může být pozorována snaha učinit nesmrtelnými již existující prvky mýtů tak, že jim vtiskne život ve zcela novém prostředí. Boom příběhů o „chlupci, který zůstal za živu“, který byl zaznamenán v posledním desetiletí, má tedy jistě své opodstatnění. Jakkoli je příběh v mnohém nový, jeho podstata stojí na pilířích tradičních světových mýtů, některé jsou reprezentovány výrazněji, některé méně, ale faktem zůstává, že jsou napříč všemi sedmi všudypřítomné. Harry Potter je tak hodnotným dílem, které dokáže mladým čtenářům odhalit některé tradiční hodnoty čerpané z mytologie po dlouhá staletí a čtenář si tak odnese nejen zábavu, ale zároveň i ponaučení.

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## 10 APPENDICES

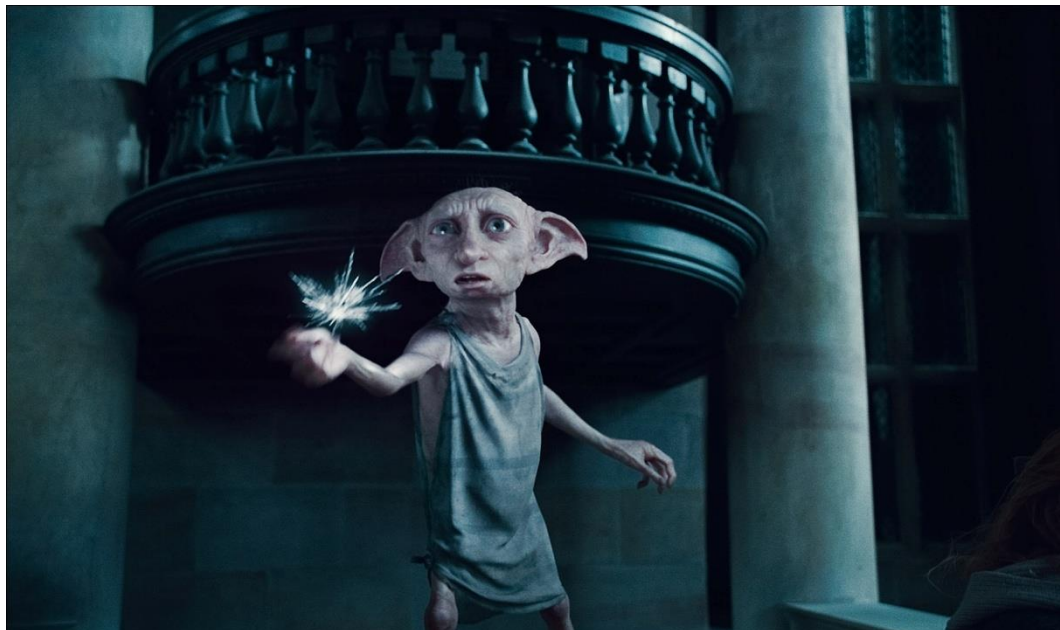
### Appendix A

Brownies, as pictured in traditional Celtic myths



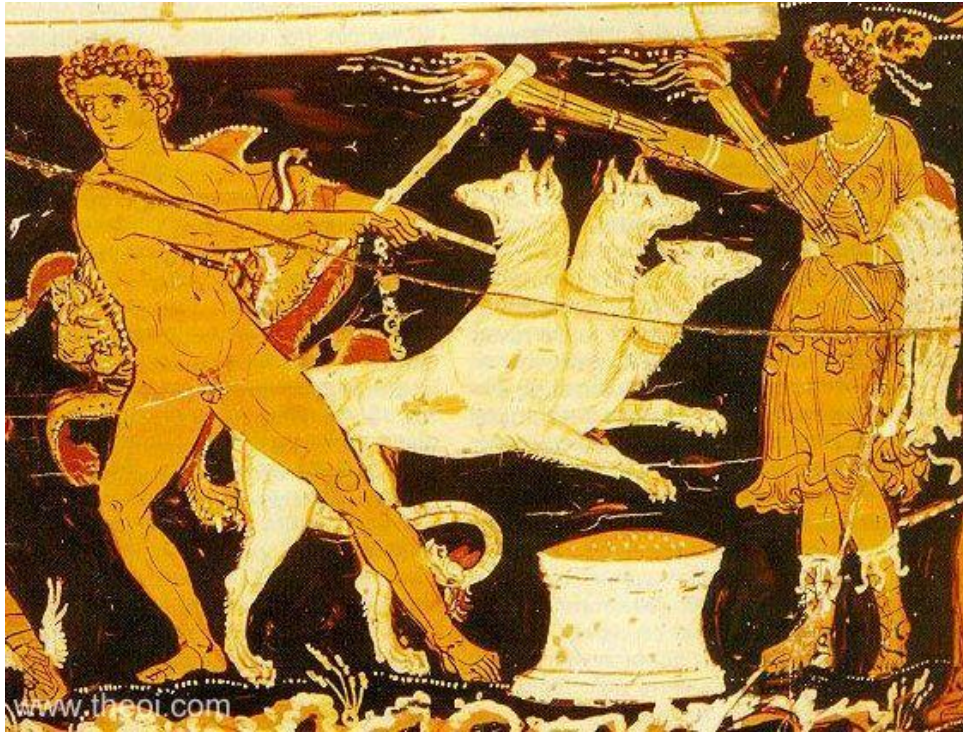
### Appendix B

House-elf Dobby, as pictured in the film Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets



## Appendix C

Cerberus, the three headed dog guarding the entrance to the Underworld, as pictured in Greek mythology



## Appendix D

Fluffy, the three headed dog, as pictured in the film Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

