

**Eastern Illinois University**  
Suzie Park

September 14, 2017

# The Boy Who Lived: Harry Potter and the Culture of Death

Suzie Park, *Eastern Illinois University*

I'm excited to see all of your faces. Thank you to Booth Library, all the staff and everyone who's organized this - all the administrators who are forced to come up here and say things.

The Boy Who Lived: Harry Potter and the Culture of Death. I don't think you would be here if you haven't read Rowling's novels, except now I know that Provost Gatrell has not read any of them -- or seen the films. So I will be talking about all sorts of plot -- he told me -- you told me that! -- so I will be talking about all sorts of plot points without using what's now become the awfully cliched but still somehow funny insertion of the morning spoiler alert every two minutes about Harry Potter. I just wanted to make that spoiler alert alert right from the very beginning.

Well, this is indeed a great honor to be asked to speak today as part of Booth Library's commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the publication of the first Harry Potter novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, which later became known as *The Sorcerer's Stone*. While it is indeed a great honor, I must admit that I am a relative latecomer to JK Rowling's novels. Just five years ago I hadn't read even one, which I'm almost certain puts me far behind most of you, except for the provost.

As someone who more or less reads for a living and teaches others ways of reading I didn't think I had time for novels that, at cursory glances during trips to book shops first in North Carolina, then at Berkeley and later in Charleston, Illinois, informed me seemed to be growing more enormous and unwieldy with each new volume. The only thing bigger, it seemed, was the media frenzy with which each book was received. I think I may have bought into that old academic suspicion that something that popular must be, well, not quite worthy.

I'm not here to convince you that Rowling's novels are worth reading -- you likely already know that -- but I am willing to make a case that the novels have a story to tell about a thing that recent voices from a variety of perspectives have been reminding us that we need to be thinking about more, and that thing is our own very human mortality. So the first thing I want to tell you is that I think Harry Potter is very much a product of our own time, if by our own time we mean the last 20 years or so, in that Harry Potter, like many other recent academic and popular voices, reminds us that without death there is no life.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in the last few years we have witnessed the beginnings of a process we might call the mainstreaming of death. Without any of us truly noticing it might seem surprising that there hasn't been a week in the last three years when there wasn't a book about death on the New York Times nonfiction bestseller list. The subtitles and reviews of these books tell us a lot about what we need to be thinking about -- whether it's medicine and what matters in the end or lessons from the crematory, living the good life while facing aging, illness and mortality, or the moment when breath becomes air as a doctor-turned-patient dies of cancer - - very uplifting stuff. These books buy a tool that one day Caitlin Doughty, Oliver Sacks and Paul Kalanithi offer us the more meditative side of the same types of conversations taking place in *Keeping up with the Kardashians* or in a recent episode of the television series *Grace and Frankie*, in which Frankie, played by Lily Tomlin, and eventually Grace (Jane Fonda) agreed to help their friend with terminal cancer end her life.

We seem to be witnessing a major swerve away from *carpe diem*, a “seize the day” byproduct of the 1980s. Some of us who are a bit older -- not me, of course -- might remember that famous scene in Robin Williams’ *Dead Poets Society* where he whispers “*carpe diem*” to a hush crowd of breathless students and a move towards contemplative slow planning. *Carpe mortem* -- seize the death, if you will -- I had considered *Carpe Mortem: Harry Potter of the Culture of Death* as the title for this talk because, as you well know, Harry does, indeed, need to seize the death. It’s the moment that the whole series of books leads up to. It’s the moment when Harry must confront death, what he calls nearing the end of the last volume, “the thing itself.” And what with all the Latin charms and spells -- *Lumos*, *Protego* and *Expecto Patronum* -- there’s a really nice collection of spells out there that you should look at -- it’s very thorough -- that populate the books. What trace could be better than *carpe mortem* to articulate the ultimate spell that binds Harry Potter to us?

But I’m getting ahead of myself. The sharp public turn of thinking on death, which Rowling’s books may well have paved the way for, seems to have moved from a more private, potentially more agonized space of thought to a public space such as this one and is that one’s philosophical and practical reflective and utilitarian, and college-aged persons, such as many of you, while you are urged to participate in democratic processes such as voting, are not given enough credit for being able to prepare for and cope with, let alone seriously contemplate, mortality. Yet many young persons will no doubt face the loss of loved ones, particularly grandparents and great-grandparents, over the course of 30 university years.

The Harry Potter novels, like this new generation of writers and thinkers about death, have put the latest spin on the words of the English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and Prometheus Unbound. Death is the bill which those who live call life. They sleep and it is lifted. I’m currently teaching a course on the Potter novels -- well, it’s a course on British Romanticism, the literature written and read on the British Isles during the 50 odd years on either side of 1800 -- but I’m hoping to show my students, and I see some of them here today, in that course two things: one, that Rowling’s novels are very much indebted to this period and two, that Rowling deliberately writes her novels and the inheritance of the writers and thinkers of this period.

And while I’m certain that a Renaissance scholar might be able to see Shakespearean resonances in the novels, to see a Lady Macbeth in a Bellatrix Lestrange -- this was me in high school -- or a Coriolanus in Lord Voldemort -- they were both played by Ray Fiennes and film adaptations, after all -- and I do pronounce that name correctly -- it is Voldemort -- not Voldemort as the Hollywood filmmakers starting with Chris Columbus would so grievously have it ... Yes, a Renaissance scholar might see Shakespeare or modernists might see stylistic similarities between a Rowling and a Virginia Woolf, but the only literary folks who would really have a decent argument about the right to claim the Potter novels as one of theirs would be those pesky medievalists. But there’d be no doubt -- the Wizarding World is painfully medieval -- a place like Hogwarts. Hogwarts, not to mention Durmstrang or Beauxbatons, resonates far more with the monastery or convent of the Middle Ages than it does with anything else in the intervening centuries, right? (wrong)

We often forget just why we call the Romantic period the Romantic period. Yes, it has something to do with love but not precisely romantic in the sense of a romantic comedy. The romance of the period around 1800 had everything to do with the return to the literary styles of the Middle Ages, referring specifically to romances, works of love and adventure written in the vernacular -- think King Arthur or Robin Hood or that -- Romanticism marked a return to something medieval that had been lost since Europe had begun to exit the Dark Ages in order to seek out and eventually step into the Enlightenment. As the critic Julie Carlson once observed, "Romanticism is the only period of literature named after its love of another period of literature." So many -- and so what brings the Potter novels and Romantic literature together is their love of the medieval and what the romantics taught Rowling was how to look back to romance. And this also, not coincidentally, dovetails -- or owl tails, I suppose I should say, owl tails nicely with the other stylistic preoccupation shared by the Wizarding World and the Romantic period -- the Gothic.

It almost goes without saying that the Potter novels are very goth, sometimes playfully so, such as the recurrent motif of the animated portraits hanging throughout Hogwarts. As a student of romanticism I can point directly to the invention of a moving portrait -- very Scooby-Doo, right? -- the first painting that comes to life and that is in the very first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, so much of the fascination with the dark side including the obsessive meditation on death stems from the Gothic Revival of medieval forms in the late 1700s. But the thing that I ironically have not yet talked about is the way that Rowling through Harry Potter addresses death, and to do that I need to beg your indulgence for one last piece of Romanticism that Harry Potter embodies -- the Bildungsroman (that's just *Castle of Otranto* -- weird, weird stuff)... the Bildungsroman. The reason we continue to call it the Bildungsroman -- the Germans invented it, both this type novel and the word to describe it. We can also call it, and often do, a novel of development or a novel of education, and perhaps most commonly, a coming-of-age novel. But mostly academics just stick to Bildungsroman.

The Bildungsroman shows how the protagonist transforms psychologically, intellectually, morally from youth through to adulthood. That's the literary definition, but you all know what a Bildungsroman is even if you've never heard the word before: *Huck Finn*? Bildungsroman. *Catcher in the Rye*? Bildungsroman. *Native Son*? Bildungsroman. *Jane Eyre*, *Bless Me, Ultima*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *House on Mango Street*, even *Beloved* -- all Bildungsroman. The very first one, most critics agree, was a work by the great German writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe is more or less the German equivalent of Shakespeare. They have a better picture of him -- there we go... He began his career as a proponent of the Sturm und Drang movement, usually called in English the storm and stress school of literature, a group of writers who rebelled against the conventions of their day by depicting extreme emotion and irrationality in their poems and novels. No doubt we can hear the names Sturm und Drang in one of the famous wizarding schools of the Harry Potter novels, *Durmstrang*, just an inversion, and the student Viktor Krum of *Durmstrang* is very reminiscent of a Sturm und Drang character. I mentioned this because I think Rowling -- Rowling, sorry -- had Goethe very much in mind in writing the Harry Potter novels.

So the very first Bildungsroman was Goethe's *The Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister* in 1795. It tells the story of a young man, Willy, or Wilhelm, who goes on a journey of self-discovery. What many people don't know about Wilhelm Meister is how the story ends since Goethe didn't actually finish it until 1829 -- more than 30 years later, in the sequel *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*. And very few of those who struggled through the first part go on to finish the series, published just a few years before Goethe's death. So not that many people actually learn just what all of Wilhelm's education, his apprenticeship, his journeyman years, were all about. The whole time we find out near the end Wilhelm has been training to be a doctor. Why this had to be a secret the whole time is rather mysterious. It would be a little bit like finding out just before the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* if J.K. Rowling suddenly revealed that all this time Harry hasn't been in training to become a wizard; he's, in fact, been working toward a career as an accountant. *Harry Potter and the Unbalanced Spreadsheet? What?!*

Back to Goethe. It's important, though, that Wilhelm becomes a doctor, because in the final chapter he saves his own son from drowning, since he learned a trick on how to revive drowning people through bloodletting. That admittedly sounds a bit more medieval -- bloodletting, really? -- than romantic, but be that as it may. What the *Harry Potter* novels do is offer us a kind of inversion of this story of teaching someone how to keep someone else alive. *Harry Potter* teaches us how to accept that we are going to die. In fact, that we need to die. In the debut launch of the *Deathly Hallows* Harry recognizes, quote, "the incontrovertible truth," which was that he must die. "I must die. He must end." End quote. It is a striking moment of revelation, an emphatically unpublic and private one in an otherwise highly public and famous life. Harry calls death the thing itself -- twice he calls it the thing itself -- and if I may speak for a moment to those of you in the crowd having some familiarity with the history of philosophy, I think you may have an idea why they keep saying that Harry calls death the thing itself, but I Kant talk about that. See what I did there? Kant? There's nothing like a joke about Immanuel Kant to rouse a crowd.

OK, the movement turns on Harry's intimate act of facing death, yet any reader, any one of us would recognize and share his feeling of wanting to slow down time to have a bit more of it. This desire for more time is so ordinary, in fact, that it feels extremely familiar. Parting from his best friends Hermione and Ron is particularly excruciating, quote in the last book, "He felt he would have given all the time remaining to him for just one last look at them, but then, would he ever have the strength to stop looking?" Harry's mother Lily, too, when she takes shape amongst the group of the dead who shepherd and console Harry as he faces his death, looks and looks at Harry, quote, "Her green eyes so like his searched his face hungrily as though she would never be able to look at him enough." End quote. I find that moment quite poignant.

And even as the longing for more time feels so familiar the time of dying does seem to follow an entirely different rhythm that is unfamiliar, jarringly sudden and alien, quote, "His heart was leaping against his ribs like a frantic bird; perhaps it knew it had little time left. Perhaps it was determined to fulfill a life time of beats before the end." End quote. Let there be no doubt when Rowling writes "his heart was leaping" she alludes to the famous lyric by the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, "my heart beats up," and I wanted to find the cheesiest image, and there were a lot -- this one's pretty good, though -- "My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the

sky so was it when my life began so is it when (so, sorry) so is it now I am a man, so be it when I shall grow old or that we die.” The words worthy of contraction of past, present, future so was it, so is it, so be it, in this moment of intense overflow of emotions, Rowling evokes in the intense awareness Harry experiences as he comes face-to-face with his mortality. Quote, “Every second he breathed the smell of the grass, the cool air on his face was so precious to think that people had years and years -- time to waste -- so much time it dragged, and he was clinging to each second.” end quote

People who study narrative spend a lot of time thinking about endings and beginnings. Why does the ending matter so much, in life and in a work of fiction? And why do people tend to fall into repetition, again in life as much as in fiction? The critic Peter Brooks surmised that we are all reading for the plot -- waiting recklessly to see how things turn out and how ultimately characters exit their stories and describe the primal urge in human beings to learn what it means to die without ourselves actually dying. Instead we tell and listen to stories obsessively. Surgeon and incredibly eloquent best-selling writer Atul Gawande brings this drive to keep reading to the end to the realm of contemporary medical reality. As Gawande puts it, the way a story ends reshapes, revises how we view the entirety of the story. This has major consequences for a society that has plenty to say about life-extending medical technologies and very little to say about preparing for death. And this is from Gawande: “Life is meaningful because it is a story. Unlike your experiencing self, which is absorbed in the moment, your remembering self is attempting to recognize not only the peaks of joy and valleys of misery but also how the story works out as a whole. Why would a football fan let a few flubbed minutes at the end of the game ruin three hours of bliss? Because a football game is a story, and in stories endings matter.” end quote

As a medical expert and a skillful storyteller himself, Gawande stresses how new we will always be in the face of dying. We’re all plotting novices, he says, rookies when it comes to dying. This is why collective wisdom is so crucial. In its own way the Potter series is a long and educational meditation on the dead’s relationship to the living, and again this is a coming-of-age story that teaches Harry, and by extension us, more more sophisticated, more careful ways of reading ourselves and others. This is important because preparing for death in our competition-saturated culture usually means fighting it, so it is almost no kind of preparation at all. Rowling is brilliant on so many counts but rather strangely, I think it is our ability to narrate worry and the sheer exuberance that follows from the lifting of worry that is most brilliant, most dynamic and subtle. Specifically, Harry spends a great deal of time worrying about the possibility of dying too soon and without any real sense of preparedness. Just to get the lay of the land, then, let us examine a few examples of Harry’s encounters with death. I mean besides opening the series with what is basically a missed appointment with death when Lord Voldemort should have killed the infant Harry handily without a hitch.

Besides this near miss, the Potter series is chock-full of death’s close attendance upon the living. Examples range from the humorous, such as the large cast of ghosts who hang around Hogwarts residing inside and outside of portraits, who, like the living, exhibit their own affable and annoying neuroses, thus nearly headless Nick feels insecure about not being fully headless from his botched execution. And then there is Harry’s dead history professor who is so aggressive in

his determination to four generations of Hogwarts students that nothing would ever deflect Professor Binns from plowing on through his notes on goblin rebellions -- as Binns hadn't let his own death stand in the way of continuing to teach. At the other end of the range we find seriously sustained and agonizing moments of worry, sometimes over the entire length of a novel. For instance in the Goblet of Fire when Harry is inexplicably entered as one of the four competitors in the Triwizard Tournament, surely a plot point anticipating the Hunger Games by about 80 years, he experiences a full academic year of extreme worry that borders on sheer terror, for Harry must prepare for three ridiculously difficult tournament challenges, but he doesn't, in most cases, have a clear clue about the actual tasks and hurdles. All he knows is that if he loses a challenge he might very well die, even with all of the talk about safety first in the administration of the games.

It is when he is pushed to do his best but with the uncanny sense that he has simply found himself in a strange place that Harry seems to be shuttled forward to his guaranteed demise, thus Rowling narrates Harry's fear as a movement toward final acts. quote "Harry was finding it hard to think about the future at all. He felt as though his whole life had been leading up to and would finish with the first task, in a boat." Rowling repeatedly notes to how awfully time speeds up when you most want it to slow down. quote "It is a strange thing, but when you are dreading something and would give anything to slow down time, it has a disobliging habit of speeding up. The days until the first task seemed to slip by as though someone had fixed the clocks to work at double speed." end quote Frankly it's a bit like the feeling I had in writing this paper. And all those pictures being rendered are of me writing this paper. When Harry does survive a Triwizard task relief washes over him and he almost immediately forgets how consumed by worry he was - - this even when his soothsaying divination professor Sybill Trelawney constantly reminds Harry about his impending death. "Death comes ever closer, its circles overhead like a vulture, ever lower, ever lower over the castle." Harry shrugs off Professor Trelawney's repeated warnings because of their repetitiveness. He says, "If I dropped dead every time she's told me I'm going to I'd be a medical miracle."

Even as Harry discounts this form of repetition, the whole trajectory of his life has been set out as a fulfillment of a set of turns, a highly repetitious form we would call a pattern. The loftiest term for this pattern is prophecy, and since prophecy entails moving through the predicted motions of a sketched out plan, it is no wonder that Harry feels like he doesn't have much choice about the tasks in life that have been thusly foretold, and yet ultimately he learns that he is always making choices and that, especially when it comes to his treatment of other people, every one of them matters. As the title of my talk indicates the Boy Who Lived is singled out for his exceptional ability to survive. Harry's fame rests exclusively on his survival of a powerful wizard's attack. He has been especially marked literally by Voldemort, who simply wanted him dead. From his infancy, then, he is the Boy Who Lived, he is the chosen one. Since Harry doesn't want this status of singularity he spends much of his time resisting this undeserved specialness throughout the series. Harry endures his fame, which bestows upon him heaps of unwanted attention producing either unrealistic expectations from the dotting fans or hateful jeering from enemies.

In any case the system of fame into which Harry is thrown does not allow anything he actually deserves, be it credit or calumny. The magical world, in other words, is no more of a meritocracy than is the muggle world. As Harry complains, he is unconscious of his accomplishments, past and future. quote “I’m famous, and I can’t even remember what I’m famous for.” end quote. Harry may be unconscious of his origins but never fear, the unconscious is here. You see, a major part of the novel of education or formation, the Bildungsroman, is unconscious development. Just as we don’t actually see our bones growing or cells dividing and multiplying, though we know that we’re growing we also don’t witness at any granular level much of our intellectual and moral growth. Yet it is happening, and literary works typically record such moments of significance but invisible and unconscious growth in a satisfyingly organized fashion.

I will provide an instance from one of the most famous poems in the English language, The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet’s Mind. This is a poem fraught with all of the pressure marks of an artist who hopes to convey how utterly extraordinary, painful and thrilling his peculiar training was in his calling to become a poet. Here we have again the poet William Wordsworth, Romantic poet extraordinaire, recalling his boyhood act of stealing a boat in the night for a joyride. But this is no ordinary joyride. It is one that becomes spectacularly important to his formation. Before I read a section from The Prelude I should explain that one of Wordsworth’s most compelling and enduring insights into the psychology of creative production is this very useful concept of the spot of time. It boils down to this -- the spot of time is a highly structured episode that contains, in a sense, how you remember the most intense moments. Often bordering on the traumatic, these spots are nevertheless ultimately pleasurable and even necessary for the poet to jumpstart his imaginative powers, which become worn down and depressed by trivial occupations in adulthood. Let’s listen for a moment to what a spot of time looks like or sounds like in the first Rowling novel (for the adults that are left). This is the significant moment of transition from home to school in Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone, or Sorcerer’s Stone. “‘You’ll get your first sight of Hogwarts in a sec,’ Hagrid called over his shoulder, ‘just around this bend here.’ There was a loud whoooo, the narrow paths had opened suddenly onto the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers and the fleet of little boats moved off all at once gliding across the lake, which was as smooth as glass. Everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle overhead and towering over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood.”

Now listen to these lines from Wordsworth’s boyhood act and see if you can hear echoes of Harry Potter. “One summer evening led by her I found a little boat tied to a willow tree within a rocky cave, its usual home. Straight I unloosed her chain and stepping in, pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth and troubled pleasure. I fixed my view upon the summit of a craggy ridge, the horizon’s utmost boundary, far above was nothing but the stars and the gray sky. She was an elfin pinnacle. Lustily I dipped my oars into the silent lake and as I rose upon the stroke, my boat went heaving through the water like a swan. When from behind that craggy steep till then the horizons bound a huge peak -- black and huge as if with voluntary power instinct up reared its head, I struck and struck again and growing still in stature the grim shape towered up between

me and the stars and still, or so it seemed, with purpose of its own and measured motion like a living thing strode after me.” end quote. Trauma, rinse, repeat. Working through means we become a better and more patient reader of oneself and others and learning to see the ordinary activities and objects of the world as extraordinary, loaded with important lessons to impart this transition from home life to school life hinges upon being teachable, educable. It’s what not only keeps you alive, as Harry learns, but also able to enjoy life. Voldemort has no respect for the philosophical teachings of others, no patience for the doubts, mysteries, questions that characterize the learning process. What Voldemort doesn’t understand ultimately thwarts all of his best schemes and, in the end, kills him. Not coincidentally Voldemort’s impatience with learning also saves Harry, who doesn’t die. Paradoxically, because Harry learns to embrace death he is spirited.

In one of the most extents... extensive enactments of the Socratic method of teaching I’ve ever seen, Albus Dumbledore explains finally Voldemort’s knowledge remained woefully incomplete. That which Voldemort does not value he takes no trouble to comprehend -- of house elves and children’s tales, of love, loyalty and innocence. Voldemort knows and understands nothing -- nothing, that they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic is a truth he has never grasped. Voldemort is unteachable. Harry is not. The way up is hard to do. It’s hard -- very hard to learn that no one of us is so special that we will escape the notice of death. Thus, the hardest lesson of all -- the main crisis that develops over an entire adolescence and adulthood and of which one might have only a glimmer as a child -- no one beats death. And, of course, we had a clear preview of this largest of life lessons in the very first Potter book when Harry learns how his parents actually died and how much he yearns to speak with them. By the time we get to book three, the Prisoner of Azkaban, Harry faces the soul-sucking Dementors and has difficulty learning the Patronus charm or protective charm precisely because he wants more than anything to be able to hear his parents’ voices. quote “Terrible though it was to hear his parents last moments replayed inside his head.” end quote. He nevertheless wants it.

Let’s not forget where the Potter series began, too -- and Rowling won’t let us, in any case. The whole series starts with characters who must give up the pursuit of the elixir of life. The prospect of cheating death is something to forgo step away from as we saw in Dumbledore’s explanation of Nicholas Flamel’s choice to give up the Philosopher’s Stone in their original life quote, “To one as young as you sure it seems incredible but to Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel it really is like going to bed after a very very long day, (like 600 years old). After all, to the well-organized mind death is but the next great adventure; you know, the stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want -- the two things most human beings would choose above all, the trouble is humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them,” end quote. For the close reader of literature, everything is the Mirror of Erised, all meaning appears backwards a reflection of our own desires, and worse traumas unfolded and magically resolved within a fantastically comforting, more logical, and more highly organized series of moving pictures. Death never makes sense, it is always unfamiliar, ripping us out of time and space. When Harry’s classmate Cedric Diggory dies, time stops. Quote, “For a

second that contained an eternity, Harry stared into Cedric's face, at his open and gray eyes, blank and expressionless as the windows of a deserted house." End quote.

In stubbornly refusing to sentimentalize death as much as any author can, I think Rowling is persistently educated about death. From the first book Dumbledore consistently ruminates in the power of language to help shape our reality. He says, "Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of the name increases fear of the thing itself." End quote. By naming the thing itself, whether it is Voldemort or death, we diffuse and diminish some of its power, some of its ability to frighten us. I don't put much stock in being appropriate, but I do find it fitting and I hope you will, too, that Booth Library's Harry Potter celebration coincides with Family Weekend. Since, dear parents who are out there, you may very well have shared the experience discovering Harry Potter together with your children. You've entrusted, at least in part, your child's formation and educational growth to an educational institution like EIU. The filling out of his or her Bildungsroman, their own coming-of-age novel. So thank you, if parents are here.

Isn't it appropriate, then, to remember how vital parent figures are in the Potter series? Indeed, I can't imagine what education would look like without parents or the guidance of parent-like figures. In Harry Potter's case it turns out that a parent's gratitude or love, in its maximal, most fully developed and incontrovertible form, is the greatest protection afforded against death. Now this is fantasy, of course, a true warding off of death is every parent's deepest wish of producing an unbreakable charm, protecting her child from infancy to at least the age of seventeen, is impossible. And yet, the wish is there. It's always there. There is no more valuable inheritance for a child from a parent than of love. Harry scoffs mightily at this singular lesson, even into the sixth book of the series saying to Dumbledore, "I can't love," it was only with difficulty that he stopped himself, adding 'big deal.'" Yet he finally gets it, when he intuits the true answer to the prophecy. Quote, "He must die," end quote, so that others can live.

It is sacrifice -- death with love without compulsions, that endures and thus preserves life. His job was to walk calmly and to death's welcoming arms. Because we cannot bestow more time to those we love. Because we cannot get more time to joy and living. With not a single magical Time Turner in sight, but the benefit of the elixir of life within reach, we can only tread ever so lightly leaving only our mark. Our deepest impression of love accompanied by the gentlest of whispers spelling out our love. That mysterious gift, like Harry's mother, "be brave, I'm so proud of you." And if I may end this way, let us take with us the sage words of Dumbledore, let us call the thing itself by name, directly. If I could cast a spell, and I know I can't, I would wave my piece of professorial chalk and utter to you all, "Carpe Mortem." Thank you.