



SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE

DOI: 10.18287/2782-2966-2021-1-3-13-19

Submitted: 22.07.2021

Revised: 10.09.2021

Accepted: 30.09.2021

**V.S. Ryabov**

International Market Institute, Samara,  
Russian Federation

E-mail: rjabow@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3526-3957>

**A.E. Serikov**

Samara National Research University,  
Samara, Russian Federation

E-mail: aenserikov@mail.ru

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4213-8089>

## Signs and meanings of sacrifice in J. K. Rowling's “Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone”

**Abstract:** the article discusses symbolic means that express different meanings of the “victim” concept and the idea of sacrifice in J. K. Rowling's novel “Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone”. The book's title refers to the alchemical understanding of a philosopher's stone as a means of immortality. Since the main purpose of the sacrifice rite is the magic of the appropriate death and rebirth essence, i.e. immortality, the philosopher's stone can be interpreted as a symbol of sacrifice, and the stages of obtaining it – as the rite stages of selection and preparation of the future victim for her / his sacralization or sanctification. There are at least two criteria for a typical victim, and they are the ones that determine the purity of a soul: the degree of innocence and the severity of the suffering. On a symbolic level the novel describes the transformation of a victim into sacrifice the essence of which is the soul purification. Only innocent victims, who have suffered personally but at the same time did not make other people suffer intentionally, may become a sacrifice. The main characteristic feature of Harry Potter as the novel's protagonist is his readiness for self-sacrifice, which consists of such components as absence of greed and desire for power, as well as the ability to love, to overcome suffering and fear, to take risks and pose a challenge to prohibitions in the name of love, accepting both victories and defeats.

**Key words:** culture; victim; sacrifice; rite; children's fiction; Harry Potter; semiotics; semantics.

**Citation:** Ryabov, V.S. and Serikov, A.E. (2021), Signs and meanings of sacrifice in J.K. Rowling's “Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone”, *Semioticheskie issledovaniya. Semiotic studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 13–19, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18287/2782-2966-2021-1-3-13-19>.

**Acknowledgments:** the author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research under Grant No. 19 011 00872 “Philosophical anthropology of victim: sacralization, management, design”.

**Information about conflict of interests:** the authors declare no conflict of interests.

© **Ryabov V.S., 2021** – Assistant Professor of the Department of Germanic Languages, Samara University of Public Administration (International Market Institute), 21, Aksakova Street, Samara, 443030, Russian Federation.

© **Serikov A.E., 2021** – Candidate of Philosophy, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of Philosophy Department, Samara National Research University, 34, Moskovskoe shosse, Samara, 443086, Russian Federation.

НАУЧНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

УДК 177.7 + 81.37

**В.С. Рябов**

Самарский университет государственного  
управления «Международный институт  
рынка». г. Самара, Российская Федерация

E-mail: rjabow@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3526-3957>

**А.Е. Сериков**

Самарский национальный исследовательский университет имени академика С.П. Королева, г. Самара, Российская Федерация

E-mail: aeserikov@mail.ru

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4213-8089>**Знаки и значения жертвоприношения в романе Дж. К. Роулинг «Гарри Поттер и философский камень»**

**Аннотация:** в статье рассматриваются символические средства, выражающие различные значения понятия «жертва» и идею жертвоприношения в романе Дж. К. Роулинг «Гарри Поттер и философский камень». Название книги отсылает к алхимическому пониманию философского камня как средства бессмертия. Поскольку основной целью ритуала жертвоприношения является магия правильной смерти и возрождения, то есть бессмертия, философский камень можно трактовать как символ жертвоприношения, а этапы его получения – как этапы ритуала выбора и подготовки будущей жертвы к ее сакрализации. Существует как минимум два критерия типичности жертвы-пострадавшего, и они же являются критериями чистоты души: степень невинности и тяжесть страданий. На символическом уровне роман описывает превращение жертвы-пострадавшего в сакральную жертву, суть которого – очищение души. Сакральными жертвами могут стать только невинные жертвы, которые сами пострадали, но не заставляли намеренно страдать других. Главным свойством Гарри Поттера как главного героя романа является его готовность к самопожертвованию, которая складывается из таких компонентов, как отсутствие жадности и стремления к власти, а также способности любить, преодолевать страдания и страх, рисковать и бросать вызов запретам во имя любви, принимая как победы, так и поражения.

**Ключевые слова:** культура; жертва; жертвоприношение; ритуал; детская литература; Гарри Поттер; семиотика; семантика.

**Цитирование:** Рябов В.С., Сериков А.Е. Знаки и значения жертвоприношения в романе Дж.К. Роулинг «Гарри Поттер и философский камень» // Семиотические исследования. Semiotic studies. 2021. Т. 1, № 3. С. 13–19. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18287/2782-2966-2021-1-3-13-19>.

**Благодарности:** исследование выполнено при частичной финансовой поддержке РФФИ в рамках научно-исследовательского проекта № 19 011 00872 «Философская антропология жертвы: сакрализация, управление, дизайн».

**Информация о конфликте интересов:** авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

© **Рябов В.С., 2021** – старший преподаватель кафедры германских языков, Самарский университет государственного управления «Международный институт рынка», 443030, Российская Федерация, г. Самара, ул. Г.С. Аксакова, 21.

© **Сериков А.Е., 2021** – кандидат философских наук, доцент, доцент кафедры философии, Самарский национальный исследовательский университет имени академика С.П. Королева, 443086, Российская Федерация, г. Самара, Московское шоссе, 34.

**Introduction**

Sacrifice is a cultural universal, one of the fundamental concepts of both archaic and modern cultures. Understanding sacrifice and self-sacrifice is a part of the common sense to be learned in childhood and then taken for granted.

Sacrifice is closely related to initiation rites. That is why, James Fraser makes emphasis on a huge amount of empirical evidence, in accordance with which a traditional sacrifice is interpreted in the majority of cases as a magical ritual aimed at killing and resurrecting a god or the deity's representative (Fraser 1922). And the essence of initiation rites is that a person symbolically dies in one status, and then is symbolically reborn in another. Jean Baudrillard, for whom sacrifice is possible only within the framework of a symbolic

order, raises this order itself to the rites of initiation, stating that initiation is the central point of the symbolic operation (Baudrillard 1976). As a clear example of the close connection between initiation and sacrifice, Renato Rosaldo describes the ritual of head hunting – a variant of human sacrifice, which for Ilongot youths was a traditional rite of initiation (Rosaldo 1993).

In this context many situations or examples of children's trials can be understood as cultural analogues of sacrifice. During the process of undergoing the test, people are divided into those who pass it successfully, and those who fail to pass it. In terms of sacrifice, this can be interpreted as follows: in order for life to continue, someone is to be sacrificed, and the rest must accept this sacrifice and continue to live, being delighted with the fact that the sacrifice has been a success. From

this point of view, a student who has failed an exam is sacrificed by those who have successfully passed this exam (Serikov 2021).

One of the most important sources of knowledge for modern children about sacrifice is children's fiction. Therefore, there are a number of semiotic questions regarding the ways this knowledge is presented in books for children. In particular, what language means are used to express various aspects of the ideas of child ordeal, sacrifice and self-sacrifice, how is the typology of victims and sacrifices presented, how are the different types of victims and sacrifices related to each other, how are the images of victims transformed into images of sacrifices?

In the present article these semiotic questions have been analyzed on the example of the first novel by J. K. Rowling from the Harry Potter series. This choice of empirical material has been made for a number of reasons. First of all, one of the cross-cutting key themes of the series is clearly self-sacrifice, in relation to which the abundance of Christian motives in the Harry Potter novels has been repeatedly discussed (Caldecott 2008), (Granger 2004), (Murphy 2011). Secondly, both these novels and the series of films based on them have become extremely popular, have been translated into many languages, and have a huge impact on the formation of modern children's values around the world. Thirdly, Harry Potter novels and films attract scientists of various specialties – from linguists and philologists to psychologists, political scientists and artificial intelligence specialists – so it is possible to compare the results of our research with some ideas presented in academic publications. Fourthly, the authors plan to make a study of all the Harry Potter novels in the future, but due to volume restrictions, in this article we analyze only the first novel.

Thus, the problem of our research can be defined as follows: what symbolic means express the knowledge about children's trials, victims and sacrifices in J. K. Rowling's novel «Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone», and what kind of knowledge is it – what exact meanings are expressed by the symbolic means in each case, and how these meanings are interrelated?

### Method

We have carefully examined the first Harry Potter novel, marking words, phrases, sentences and combinations of sentences that can be interpreted as signs of victims and sacrifices, as well as pointing out various trials on the word level. The written fragments of the text have been interpreted in terms of their meanings, i.e. they have been given some generalized interpretations. Then a comparative analysis of these meanings and the signs expressing them has been carried out. We have also classified revealed meanings of «victim» and «sacrifice» and identified the means via which the differences between the meanings are conveyed in the text, including the means by which the reader's im-

PLICIT cultural knowledge (common sense) is indicated. For example, the knowledge that a typical victim must be innocent, and that an innocent victim is best suited for the role of a sacrifice.

### The Title of the Book and the Philosopher's Stone as an Alchemical Symbol

The first volume is called «Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone». In the United States, this book is published under the title «Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone». Arthur A. Levine, under whose imprint the book was published by Scholastic in 1998, thought that «Philosopher's Stone» would be too arcane for American readers and proposed the title «Harry Potter and the School of Magic» which Rowling did not like. «Eventually, the author suggested Sorcerer's Stone, and that's how the book is known in the U.S. market where Scholastic has the rights. Rowling later admitted in a web chat for BBC Red Nose Day in 2001 that she regretted the decision» (Brew 2018).

«Philosopher's stone» in the title refers to the alchemical tradition and understanding of the story as *Magnum opus* – the process of obtaining the philosopher's stone and achieving enlightened consciousness, the merging of spirit and matter. *Magnum opus* consists of several stages, and these are the stages of not only chemical transformation but also purification of the soul. «The process can be basically described in four stages as *nigredo*, *albedo*, *citrinitas* and *rubedo*. At each stage the alchemist is subjected to an increasingly intense purification, which is followed by a union with the fire of that stage (alchemical marriage), a rebirth of a new sense of self and then the death of that sense of self (in order to proceed to the next stage)» (Hamilton 1985).

The philosopher's stone in alchemy is a means of rebirth, immortality. It was intended not only to refine metals but also to serve as a universal medicine. Its solution was supposed to heal from all diseases, rejuvenate the old body and make life longer. Since the main purpose of the sacrifice ritual (according to Fraser) is the magic of proper death and rebirth, i.e. immortality, the philosopher's stone can be interpreted as a symbol of sacrifice, and the stages of obtaining it – as the ritual stages of selection and preparation of the future victim to her / his sacralization. From a psychological point of view, the essence of sacralization is the purification of the soul, which is presented in the text by the gradual transformation of Harry Potter's image as a victim into a sacrificial one.

### Harry Potter, Christianity, and Mythological Symbols of Sacrifice

Since occult or magical practices are considered a sin from a Christian point of view, many Christians around the world have taken the Harry Potter novels critically, forbidding their children to read them. On the other hand, many Christian readers believe

that these novels inculcate spiritual Christian values in children, and the external form of the story about magic does not contradict with the Christian values that may be found in any other fairy tale. There is even a point of view that Rowling's novels are Christian in the sense that Harry resembles Christ: "As Harry Potter is the main hero of the series, he is comparable to a Christ-figure..." (Harris 2019).

The possibility of understanding the image of Harry Potter as a figure of Christ is discussed not only in Christian literature. In Derek Murphy's book "Jesus Potter Harry Christ", Harry is compared to Christ from the atheistic perspective. The author argues that Christ is not a historical, but a fictional figure, similar to a literary character. Therefore, he can be compared to an obviously fictional character, Harry Potter. In accordance with the author's conclusion, they differ in a number of ways.

Christ teaches suffering, meekness and humility; renounce this life and look forward to the next. Harry reminds us to embrace each small moment of happiness. Jesus says anything that happens is God's will: God is in control. Harry takes full responsibility for this world... Also, while Jesus knew he would come back, and then live forever, Harry had no such hope; hence his sacrifice was much more courageous... Jesus, as son of God and divine being, represents a level we can never reach... Harry, in contrast, is fully human; he doubts, sins, expresses emotions, makes poor decisions, and he eventually makes the ultimate sacrifice – which most importantly he had no desire to make (Murphy 2011, p. 417).

Some Christian authors come to similar conclusions about the differences between Harry and Jesus. As Leonie Caldecott writes,

*Harry is flawed, you might even say damaged. He is disobedient, willful, at times deceitful (at least in front of figures of authority), and he carries a huge burden of anger in the face of the tragedy at the heart of his young life. In short, he is a sinner, perhaps a typical sinner for our time, in which social breakdown and dysfunctionality have become the defining note of many young people's lives. Yet Rowling portrays Harry's growth and maturation . . . Rowling never loses sight of the ultimate goal, which is ultimately Christocentric if not overtly Christian (Caldecott 2008).*

So, some authors believe that Harry is a Christ-figure. Others, both from Christian and atheist positions, argue that Harry is an ordinary person, not a divine figure. Our analysis of the text confirms the second point of view. We know from the Gospels and other Christian literature that Jesus did not hate anyone and taught love to his enemies. From this point of view, Harry Potter is quite different: he knows how to forgive enemies and even tends to save their lives (in the last Harry Potter novel several episodes are devoted to this very episode), but he does not offer his

cheek to the enemies, and with the key enemy, Voldemort, he fights to the bitter end. Therefore, the image of Harry is the image of an ordinary person, and not the image of Christ. In the first novel we find clear signs of the Harry's hatred regarding his opponents and foes: "Harry had never believed he would meet a boy he hated more than Dudley, but that was before he met Draco Malfoy" (Rowling 2014, p. 153), "plotting ways of getting Malfoy expelled, which were fun to talk about even if they wouldn't work" (Rowling 2014, p. 213).

We conclude that the first novel about Harry Potter could be interpreted as Christian not because of the fact that the main character, Harry, is likened to Christ in a literal sense, but because it is a book about love and sacrifice. As John Granger says, the Philosopher's Stone should be understood as a symbol of Christ, and the Harry Potter novel, written "in the symbolism of alchemy and traditional Christian doctrine, it is an ode to the purification and perfection of the soul in Christ and his saving, sacrificial love" (Grander 2004, p. 126).

In this context many of the mythological symbols found in the novel, that relate to the sacrifice can be simultaneously interpreted as Christian. So, Harry's wand is made from holly, also known as Christ's thorn, as the crown of thorns worn by Christ on the way to Calvary was twined of holly. Inside Harry's magic wand is a phoenix feather, which in pre-Christian times symbolized the central element of the sacrifice – rebirth after death, and in Christian times – Christ and the Virgin Mary. The three-headed dog that guards the Philosopher's Stone in the dungeon under Hogwarts is undoubtedly the mythological Cerberus, the guardian of the border between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead. And the essence of sacrifice rite is the correct crossing of this particular border. Mars, shining especially brightly on the night of the killing of the unicorn, is a symbol of spilled blood. The unicorn blood that Voldemort drinks is a magical remedy that brings one back to life. But in Christianity, the unicorn is another symbol of Christ. Like Christ in the Gospels, the unicorn killed by Voldemort is an innocent victim. Killing (sacrificing) an innocent unicorn is the opposite of self-sacrifice. The scene of unicorn's killing by Voldemort and drinking its blood is an unambiguous symbol of an absolute evil embodying.

### Victims in "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone"

The novel is full of situations in which someone or somebody is portrayed as a victim of one type or another. The main meanings of an ordinary language category "victim" found in the novel are listed below. It is important to point out, that some examples of the corresponding text expressions are given in quotation marks:

– *Murder victim*. Harry's parents and other victims of Voldemort are examples of the type, "all the people he's killed" (Rowling 2014, p. 13).

– *Attempted murder victim (surviving victim, rescued victim)*. This is Harry Potter whom Voldemort tries to kill, but fails to do it, "He tried to kill the Potter's son, Harry. But he couldn't" (Rowling 2014, p. 13), "He tried to kill you... an' you lived" (Rowling 2014, p. 60), "Harry's broom had given a wild jerk and Harry swung off it. He was now dangling from it, holding on with only one hand" (Rowling 2014, p. 202), "I tried to kill you" (Rowling 2014, p. 310), "Firenze saved me, but he shouldn't have done so" (Rowling 2014, p. 279).

– *Victim who sacrifices her / his life*. "Dark days, Harry. Didn't know who ter trust, didn't dare get friendly with strange wizards or witches... terrible things happened. He was takin' over. 'Course, some stood up to him – an' he killed 'em" (Rowling 2014, p. 59), "Your mother died to save you" (Rowling 2014, p. 321).

– *Victim's (orphan's) parents murder*. "Lily an' James dead – an' poor little Harry off ter live with Muggles" (Rowling 2014, p. 16).

– *Cycling offences of a victim*. "Dudley... on his racing bike, knocked down old Mrs. Figg as she crossed Privet Drive on her crutches" (Rowling 2014, p. 33).

– *Victim's physical abuse*. "Dudley's favorite punching bag was Harry" (Rowling 2014, p. 21).

– *Victim's closet punishment*. "He had been given a week in his cupboard for this" (Rowling 2014, p. 26).

– *Victim's food deprivation*. "No meals" (Rowling 2014, p. 31).

– *Victim's school bullying*. "He was already laughed at for his baggy clothes and Sellotaped glasses" (Rowling 2014, p. 25), "Dudley's gang had been chasing him as usual" (Rowling 2014, p. 26).

– *Victim's unfair punishment*. "You – Potter – why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he'd make you look good if he got it wrong, did you? That's another point you've lost for Gryffindor. This was so unfair that Harry opened his mouth to argue..." (Rowling 2014, p. 149).

– *Victim's personal rights deprivation*. "Harry was on the point of unfolding his letter... When it was jerked sharply out of his hand" (Rowling 2014, p. 37).

– *Hatred of a victim*. "She hates the boy" (Rowling 2014, p. 24), "Snape didn't dislike Harry – he hated him" (Rowling 2014, p. 145).

– *Scapegoating of a victim*. "From being one of the most popular and admired people at the school, Harry was suddenly the most hated... Everywhere Harry went, people pointed and didn't trouble to lower their voices as they insulted him" (Rowling 2014, p. 263).

– *Humiliation of a victim*. "The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn't there – or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug" (Rowling 2014,

p. 24), "Aunt Petunia had been trying to force him into a revolting old sweater of Dudley's" (Rowling 2014, p. 26), "When Dudley had a tantrum because his knickerbocker glory didn't have enough ice cream on top, Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Harry was allowed to finish the first" (Rowling 2014, p. 28).

– *Threatening the victim*. "Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as your parents" (Rowling 2014, p. 116), "You don't want me as your enemy..." (Rowling 2014, p. 243), "Be warned, Potter – any more nighttime wanderings and I will personally make sure you are expelled" (Rowling 2014, p. 288).

– *Victim's mishap*. "She'd broken her leg tripping over one of her cats" (Rowling 2014, p. 33).

– *Deception of a victim*. "Blown up? You told me they died in a car crash!" (Rowling 2014, p. 58).

– *Victim oriented disbelief*. "Uncle Vernon didn't believe him. No one ever did" (Rowling 2014, p. 25).

– *Victim's fear*. "He did look very green, and when the cart stopped at last beside a small door in the passage wall, Hagrid got out and had to lean against the wall to stop his knees from trembling" (Rowling 2014, p. 80), "Malfoy let out a terrible scream and bolted – so did Fang. The hooded figure raised its head and looked right at Harry – unicorn blood was dribbling down its front. It got to its feet and came swiftly toward Harry – he couldn't move for fear" (Rowling 2014, p. 275).

– *Failed trial of a victim*. "I was at Hogwarts meself but I – er – got expelled, ter tell yeh the truth. In me third year. They snapped me wand in half an' everything" (Rowling 2014, p. 65), "What if he wasn't chosen at all? What if he just sat there with the hat over his eyes for ages, until Professor McGonagall jerked it off his head and said there had obviously been a mistake and he'd better get back on the train?" (Rowling 2014, p. 128).

– *Delusion of a victim*. "But Snape tried to kill me!... No, no, no. I tried to kill you... I'd have managed it before then if Snape hadn't been muttering a countercurse, trying to save you." (Rowling 2014, p. 310).

– *The victim of a joke*. "The Weasley twins were punished for bewitching several snowballs so that they followed Quirrell around, bouncing off the back of his turban" (Rowling 2014, p. 208).

– *Fair punishment of a victim*. "The Weasley twins were punished..." (Rowling 2014, p. 208), "All three of you will receive detentions – yes, you too, Mr. Longbottom, nothing gives you the right to walk around school at night..." (Rowling 2014, p. 261-262).

– *Victim blaming herself or himself*. "When he couldn't kill Harry Potter, Voldemort's power somehow broke – and that's why he's gone" (Rowling 2014, p. 13), "He tried to get past that three-headed dog on Halloween. It bit him. We think he was trying to steal whatever it's guarding" (Rowling 2014, p. 206).

The items of the list are arranged to a certain place in accordance with their meanings. There are at least two criteria for victim typicality: the degree of innocence and the severity (strength, depth) of the suffering. In the context of alchemical symbolism, both criteria of typicality are ones for the purity of a soul: a pure soul is primarily an innocent soul, and suffering purifies the soul. The innocent victims of murder at the top of the list are clearly victims. At the end of the list are the meanings that are not so commonly related to the word victim. It is hardly possible to talk seriously about the victim of children's jokes. As the result, we want to call victims those who are clearly perceived as villains and serve the forces of evil. From this perspective, Voldemort and his minions suffer, but almost no one would call them victims.

The peculiarity of a children's fairy tale is that almost all the characters here are aligned as heroes and villains. The character's positivity or negativity is itself a connotation that turns the victim into a prototypical or non-prototypical one. The prototypical victim should be positive or at least neutral, like an old lady who broke her leg tripping over a cat. A non-prototypical victim is a negative character who plots, steals, does evil deeds, and the signs of these evil deeds are signs that they cannot be quite a victim, because the victim should be pitied, and they are not pitied: "You don't think they've been hurt, do you? ... I don't care if Malfoy has..." (Rowling 2014, p. 274).

In modern English, the typical meanings of a victim have a connotation of passivity: almost no one becomes a victim voluntarily. But when people suffer and take risks to save other people, they turn from victims into sacrifices, they sacrifice themselves. In a situation of choosing between good and evil, when evil wins, the choice of the good side is self-sacrifice in the name of good. The cultural stereotype used in the novel is that only typical victims are sacralized. In the first chapters of the novel, Harry is presented primarily as a typical victim who suffers from domestic violence and humiliation, but this suffering is purifying, preparing Harry for further trials.

### **Trials as Preparations for Sacrifice**

As in almost every book devoted to school life of pupils or students, the description of the bullying to which the protagonist is subjected to by other students occupies an important place. Before Hogwarts, when Harry goes to primary school, he is mocked because of his old clothes and his sellotaped glasses, he is chased by the Dudley gang, and the main way to avoid persecution, which Harry has to experience, is to run away from bullies, hide. At that stage, he is a typical victim of bullying.

Everything changes on the train to Hogwarts, where Harry is ready to fight so as to support his friend, avoiding the coward-like behavior and keeping his dignity: "Oh, you're going to fight us, are you?"

Malfoy sneered. Unless you get out now, said Harry, more bravely than he felt..." (Rowling 2014, p. 116).

Next, we see how Harry turns from an offended schoolboy into a defender of those who are offended. So, for the sake of protecting Neville from Malfoy's attacks, he risks not just being punished, but being expelled from school.

Then we see that Harry and Ron are ready to fight not only other students. For the sake of saving Hermione, they fight a troll, although it is very dangerous, and that is not the very adventure they would like to participate in: "It was the last thing they wanted to do, but what choice did they have?" (Rowling 2014, p. 188). Hermione, in turn, also sacrifices herself, as she goes against her principles and breaks the rules – lies to the teacher – in order to help out Harry and Ron. Going against rules plays a very important role in the novel. Dumbledore and other teachers know that students violate some school regulations, but rules are made to be broken. A reader of the novel understands: it is strictly forbidden to cause other people's suffering, but other restrictions can and should be violated if it is necessary to fight evil.

Challenges are not limited to fights, duels, and battles. Selection for faculties is also a kind of a trial. In addition, you are to study, pass exams, and win sports competitions.

A special challenge for Harry is the meeting with the mirror of desires. The Mirror of Erised shows the state of the soul and can serve as a test of readiness for sacrifice. Only those who are purified can pass the ritual correctly. The mirror of desires is a symbol of purification. It shows the desires of the participant in the rite and the desires must be pure in order for the sacrifice to achieve its goal.

In the middle of the novel, Harry and some other disobedient students are punished via completing a task in the Forbidden Forest. It's a life-threatening trial: "It's into the forest you're going and I'm much mistaken if you'll all come out in one piece" (Rowling 2014, p. 267). And Harry really finds himself on the verge of life and death: "Firenze saved me, but he shouldn't have done so... Bane thinks Firenze should have let Voldemort kill me... I suppose that's written in the stars as well" (Rowling 2014, p. 279).

Harry should have died, but he has not. This situation means that at the level of the prediction, Harry has been dead, but thanks to the centaur – the symbol of crossing the border – he has crossed the border between life and death, coming back as a renewed person. In fact, according to Fraser, this is the essence of sacrifice magic.

Devil's Snare, winged keys, Wizard's Chess, a logical task to choose a bottle of medicine, a mirror of desires – all the trials in the dungeon under Hogwarts on the eve of the final battle with Quirrell / Voldemort – are successive tests of the purity of human soul's components. "The Scholastic model, following Aris-

total and Aquinas, is that there are three kinds of soul: vegetative, sensitive, and intellective... What do Harry, Ron, and Hermione find when they jump through the trapdoor? ... In sequence from carnal to spiritual, this trio of the soul's powers pass through tests for their purification" (Grander 2004, p. 121).

The last and decisive Harry's trial is the fight with Quirrell / Voldemort, in which Harry is ready to die and almost dies, but still survives / resurrects. Right before that Harry sees in the mirror of desires how he obtains the Philosopher's Stone, and immediately the stone is in his pocket. The mirror is a symbol of the desires' purity. Harry does not need immortality and thus acquires its means. The magic of sacrifice turns out to be paradoxical, because immortality as a result of this magic turns out to be with the one who refuses immortality (does not fear death, does not think about it). So, from a symbolic point of view, this final battle describes Harry's self-sacrifice, in which he participates as a sacred figure.

### Conclusions

The analysis of the first Harry Potter novel shows that it is full of self-sacrifice signs. We can conclude that self-sacrifice is the main theme of this novel. On a symbolic level, the novel describes the transformation of victim into sacrifice, the essence of which is the main character's soul purification. The comparison of different meanings of the "victim" concept shows that typical meanings implicate the innocence of the victim. Negative characters are not perceived as victims, despite the fact that they may also suffer. In order to be perceived as a victim, one has to possess positive connotation or at least be a neutral character, i.e. not to be on the evil side.

The implicit knowledge contained in the book is that good people – and most readers of the book want to be good – must be like Harry and his friends, that is, pass with dignity through various trials that fall to their lot. At the same time the main characteristic feature of Harry Potter as the novel's protagonist is his readiness for self-sacrifice, which consists of such components as absence of greed and desire for power, as well as the ability to love, to overcome suffering and fear, to take risks and break taboos in the name of love, accepting both victories and defeats.

The book suggests that the greatest achievement of a person is her / his willingness to sacrifice, while the greatest evil is to kill another human being or a creature of the wizarding world in order to save one's own life. Love justifies defeat and suffering, because they purify the soul and turn the victim into a sacrifice. Love even justifies breaking various bans and violating prohibitions, but it does not justify making other living beings suffer. Only innocent victims who have suffered themselves, but did not intentionally cause other people's and creatures' sufferings, can obtain the state of a sacrifice.

### References

- Baudrillard, J. (1976), *Symbolic exchange and death (Translated by Iain Hamilton Grant)*, SAGE Publications, New York, USA.
- Brew, S. (2018), Why did the first Harry Potter book get a title change in the U.S.?, *Mental Floss UK*, [Online], available at: <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/90924/why-did-first-harry-potter-book-get-title-change-us> (Accessed 30 May 21).
- Caldecott, L. (2008), Christian Themes in Harry Potter, *The Christian Century*, 15 January, pp. 24–27, [Online], available at: <https://www.religion-online.org/article/christian-themes-in-harry-potter/> (Accessed 30 May 21).
- Frazer, J.G. (1922), *The Golden Bough: A study of magic and religion*, Abridged edition, Project Gutenberg, [Online], available at: <https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/3623> (Accessed 20 May 21).
- Granger, J. (2004), *Looking for God in Harry Potter*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL, USA.
- Hamilton, N. (1985), *The alchemical process of transformation. Sufi Zentrum Omega*, [Online], available at: [https://www.sufismus.ch/assets/files/omega\\_dream/alchemy\\_e.pdf](https://www.sufismus.ch/assets/files/omega_dream/alchemy_e.pdf) (Accessed 30 May 21).
- Murphy, D. (2011), *Jesus Potter Harry Christ: The Fascinating Parallels Between Two of the World's Most Popular Literary Characters*, Holyblasphemy Press, Portland, OR, USA.
- Rosaldo, R. (1993), *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis: With a New Introduction*, Beacon Press, Boston, [Online], available at: <https://people.uwec.edu/degravjr/GEOG-ANTH%20351/Rosaldo-CultureAndTruth.pdf> (Accessed 20 May 21).
- Rowling, J.K. (2014), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Bloomsbury, London, UK.
- Serikov, A.E. (2021), Typical forms of children's disposition to accept and make sacrifice, *Mixtura Verborum' 2019-2020: Marginal time: collection of sci. articles*, Samarama, Samara, pp. 65–94 (In Russian).
- Unicorn (2020), *Encyclopedia Britannica*, [Online], available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/unicorn> (Accessed 18 April 21).

Дата: поступления статьи: 22.07.2021  
 после рецензирования: 10.09.2021  
 принятия статьи: 30.09.2021