

Part III: The Dark Side of the Moral Imagination

Voldemort Tyrannos: Plato's Tyrant in the *Republic*
and the Wizarding World

Anne Collins Smith
Stephen F. Austin State University

Owen M. Smith
Stephen F. Austin State University

“Voldemort himself created his worst enemy, just as tyrants everywhere do! Have you any idea how much tyrants fear the people they oppress? All of them realize that, one day, amongst their many victims, there is sure to be one who rises against them and strikes back!”

—*Half-Blood Prince* (p. 510)

“What if one of the gods should carry away a slaveholder of fifty or more slaves out of his city and deposit him, along with his wife and children and slaves, in the wilderness where he cannot be helped by his fellow free citizens? Would he not be absolutely terrified that he and his wife and children would be killed by the slaves?”

—Plato (*Rep.* 578e)¹

1. Introduction

In the *Harry Potter* novel series, by J. K. Rowling, the character of Lord Voldemort is the dictatorial ruler of the Death Eaters and aspiring despot of the entire wizarding community. As such, he serves as an apt subject for the application of Plato's portrait of the tyrant in *Republic* IX. The process of applying Plato to Voldemort, however, leads to an apparent anomaly, the resolution of which requires that we move beyond the *Republic* to the account

¹ All passages from the works of Plato have been translated by the authors. All in-text references to the *Republic* are abbreviated as *Rep.* and to the *Symposium* as *Symp.*

of beauty presented by Plato in the *Symposium*. In doing so, we shall find that while Plato can help us to understand Voldemort, Voldemort can also help us to attain a deeper understanding of Plato.

2. Voldemort as the Tyrant of the *Republic*

In “Dumbledore, Plato, and the Lust for Power,” David Lay Williams and Alan J. Kellner apply Plato’s concept of appropriate rulership to the characters of Voldemort, Albus Dumbledore, and Harry Potter, observing that “Voldemort fits perfectly into Plato’s category of ‘least trustworthy rulers.’”² They note clearly Voldemort’s failure to meet the criteria that Plato requires of those who are fit to rule the ideal Republic. As they explain, Plato’s ideal rulers must be so uninterested in power that they must be coerced to rule³; furthermore, they must not only be remarkably intelligent, but also “must combine their brains with virtue” and “use their power for good.”⁴ Williams and Kellner argue persuasively that Voldemort falls far short of meeting these requirements. We shall demonstrate further that not only does Voldemort fail to possess the positive qualities that characterize a fit ruler in *Republic VI*, he also matches almost exactly the negative qualities that characterize the tyrant in *Republic IX*.

Plato’s description of the tyrant arises in the context of a discussion of different forms of government. In addition to the ideal society, ruled by Philosopher-Kings, he also describes four less-desirable governments: timocracy (rule by those motivated by honor), oligarchy (rule by a small group, usually the wealthy), democracy (rule by the common people), and tyranny (rule by a tyrant). In order to distinguish one type of government from another, and to articulate the advantages and disadvantages of each, Plato offers distinctive portraits of the personality types that correspond to each type of ruler. He then employs the metaphor of the descent of a family over a series of generations from the best kind of person to the worst in order to describe the inevitable devolution of a society from the best to the worst kind of government.

The final, worst form of government corresponds in Plato’s metaphor to the tyrannical person, who is ruled by his lower appetites, rather than by his reason:

² David Lay Williams and Alan J. Kellner, “Dumbledore, Plato, and the Lust for Power,” in *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles*, ed. Gregory Bassham (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), pp. 128-40, quotation at p. 137.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

He shrinks from nothing, not from having sex with the person he thinks is his mother (or with any other person, or god, or animal whatsoever, for that matter), not from murdering anyone at all, not from consuming any sort of food; in short, there is no shameful or foolish act he leaves undone. (*Rep.* 571c-d)

Setting aside for the moment the question of sexual misconduct (to which we shall later return), we may note that Voldemort is guilty of the other two specific activities listed here. He has committed many murders; indeed, he first uses the killing curse to slay his own father and grandparents (*GoF* p. 646; *HBP* p. 367), an act that would come as no surprise to Socrates's friend Glaucon, who frets, "For my part, I am not at all confident about the tyrant's parents" (574b). Moreover, the first time the eleven-year-old Harry Potter sees Voldemort, he glimpses him feasting on the blood of a unicorn, showing that he does not shrink from consuming food which is not only forbidden but, as the centaur Firenze explains to Harry, utterly abhorrent:

"[I]t is a monstrous thing, to slay a unicorn," said Firenze. "Only one who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips." (*SS* p. 258)

These are not isolated incidents; Voldemort commits many other atrocities that fall under Plato's general description of any "shameful or foolish act," not the least of which are the murders required for the production of the Horcruxes.

Since the portrait of the tyrannical man traces the span of his life, Plato acknowledges that the tyrant may have had some initial potential for good, which he repudiates as his tyrannical character comes to the fore:

[A]nd if he encounters in himself any opinions or desires that may be considered decent or that even exhibit a sense of shame, he expels them from himself until he is purged of self-discipline and is filled with self-imposed madness. (*Rep.* 573a-b)

So although the young Tom Riddle we encounter in Dumbledore's memories in *Half-Blood Prince* (*HBP* pp. 269 ff.) has already exhibited reprehensible behavior prior to becoming Lord Voldemort, he also appears promising and possibly redeemable. As he grows older, he develops into an increasingly evil individual. In their final confrontation, Harry makes a last-ditch attempt to save Voldemort by encouraging him to feel remorse for his actions (*DH* p. 741), much as in the *Star Wars* saga, Luke Skywalker appeals to the shred of

goodness that Darth Vader still retains.⁵ Sadly, unlike Vader, Voldemort rejects his final chance for redemption; he has indeed expelled from himself any sense of decency or shame.

Plato describes tyrannical men in their early stages as those who “steal, commit burglary, snatch purses, rob travelers, defile temples, and enslave people” (*Rep.* 575b). These activities find their parallels in Tom Riddle’s childhood in the orphanage, where he steals from other children and commits other escalating acts of cruelty toward animals and the other children (*HBP* pp. 267-76). As such people advance in tyranny, their attitude toward others shifts as well:

Before these people come to power, when they are on their own and find themselves in need of anything, either they associate with flatterers who are eager to serve them in any way, or they ingratiate themselves with people who can supply their need; once they gain what they want, however, they discard those who once helped them. . . . Those with a tyrannical nature live their entire lives without ever being friends with anybody, being either a master or a slave to others as circumstances require, and never tasting freedom or true friendship. (*Rep.* 575e-576a)

These attitudes toward both inferiors and superiors also characterize the future Voldemort.

Tom Riddle’s association with his “flatterers who are eager to serve [him]” is seen in the classmates he gathers around him, the kernel of the group later known as the Death Eaters. When we see Riddle at Hogwarts, he is seldom alone; his Death Eater associates are not friends, however, but servants who do his bidding out of self-interest or fear. Dumbledore tells us that the members of Riddle’s circle of classmates “were a motley collection; a mixture of the weak seeking protection, the ambitious seeking some shared glory, and the thuggish gravitating toward a leader who could show them more refined forms of cruelty” (*HBP* pp. 361-62). Looking at his closest followers, we can see that he does not treat them as a person would treat his friends. Quirinus Quirrell, who allows Voldemort to use his body as a host, dies horribly as a result. As Dumbledore explains, “He [Voldemort] left Quirrell to die; he shows just as little mercy to his followers as his enemies” (*SS* p. 298). Peter Pettigrew, who becomes Voldemort’s dogsboddy after returning to human form near the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban* (*PoA* pp. 358-77), is casually used, then mutilated (*GoF* pp. 641-42), and finally discarded (*DH* pp. 470-71) by Voldemort. Voldemort threatens the family of Lucius Malfoy even after Malfoy has gone to prison for helping Voldemort (e.g.,

⁵ Lawrence Kasdan and George Lucas, *Star Wars VI: Return of the Jedi*, DVD, Dir. Richard Marquand (Marin County, CA: Lucasfilm, 1983).

HBP p. 33); he also disregards the plea of his devoted follower Severus Snape and kills Lily Potter (*DH* p. 677). As a result of these actions, both Malfoy and Snape turn against Voldemort.

Our glimpses into Tom Riddle's teenage years also reveal the subservient character of the budding tyrant as he ingratiate himself with those from whom he can obtain useful information or favors. An excellent example provided within his student days is his cajoling manner toward Professor Horace Slughorn, who comments on Riddle's "careful flattery of the people who matter" (*HBP* p. 370). The portion of his sixteen-year-old self that has been encased in the diary-Horcrux poses as a sympathetic confidant to gain the trust of Ginny Weasley, who becomes his unknowing agent as well as a source of life energy. As Riddle brags to Harry, "I've always been able to charm the people I needed" (*CoS* p. 310). As a recent graduate of Hogwarts, Riddle works hard to beguile the elderly witch Hepzibah Smith, ostensibly in his role as an acquisitions agent for Borgin and Burkes, but really to obtain objects from her for his own personal use as Horcruxes (*HBP* pp. 433-38).

Riddle's behavior toward Dumbledore offers us an even fuller parallel with Plato's description of the tyrant, since we see the two of them interact at various stages. At their first encounter, it is clear that Tom Riddle treats Dumbledore with courtesy, not out of any genuine respect, but in order to obtain desired information as well as to retain his permission to enter Hogwarts. Scolded gently for his initial rudeness in demanding proof of Dumbledore's claim to be a wizard, Riddle immediately changes tack: "Riddle's expression hardened for the most fleeting moment before he said, in an unrecognizably polite voice, 'I'm sorry, sir. I meant—please, Professor, could you show me—?'" (*HBP* p. 272). Once at Hogwarts, Tom Riddle is courteous to Dumbledore; as a recent graduate, he displays forced politeness when he returns to ask for a teaching position (*HBP* pp. 441-45); as Lord Voldemort, he feels free to be rude to Dumbledore, spitting and snarling at him, since he believes that Dumbledore can no longer be of use to him (*OOTP* pp. 813-14).

Ultimately, Plato argues, the tyrant finds himself imprisoned by his own irrational desire and fear:

Is it not the case that the tyrant, having a nature such as we have described, shuts himself up in this type of prison, being full of many and manifold desires and fears? Although his soul is greedy, he alone of all the people in the city cannot go anywhere abroad, nor can he view the sights that other free citizens want to view. Instead, he shuts himself up in his house most of the time, living hidden away like a woman and envying his fellow citizens who travel abroad and see wonderful things. (*Rep.* 579b-c)

Throughout the duration of the series, since his unexpected failure to kill the infant Harry Potter, Voldemort exhibits the fearful reclusiveness of the tyrant. Initially, he is quite literally unable to move about, having no body of his own,

and existing only as a disembodied consciousness (*SS* p. 293). Then he must share the body of Quirrell, hiding under the folds of Quirrell's turban (*SS* p. 295). Even when he regains his own body (*GoF* pp. 639-43), he is still forced to hide and work in secret, fearful of discovery and imprisonment, until the time he can openly wield power in *Deathly Hallows*.

Near the end of his discussion of the tyrant's character, Plato offers a celebrated psychological portrait of the tyrant:

In addition . . . as a result of exercising power, he must be envious, suspicious, unjust, friendless, and irreligious, and become ever more so as time passes. He welcomes and nurtures every vice, and as a result he cannot avoid being extremely unhappy, nor can he avoid making those who associate with him just as unhappy. (*Rep.* 580a)

This portrait of extreme unhappiness serves as a particularly apt description of Voldemort's followers during the final novel of the series, when his power is in its ascendancy. We see in earlier books that his followers fear his wrath when they fail to do what he asks of them⁶; in the final book, they fear even the *possibility* of arousing his wrath. In the first chapter of *Deathly Hallows*, for example, Voldemort's Death Eaters shy away as he locks eyes with Snape, "apparently fearful that they themselves would be scorched by the ferocity of the gaze" (*DH* pp. 3-4). A few pages later, Voldemort discusses his failure, to date, to destroy Harry Potter, even admitting that his own mistakes have played a role. Nevertheless, his followers react as if he is about to attack them: "The company around the table watched Voldemort apprehensively, each of them, by his or her expression, afraid that they might be blamed for Harry Potter's continued existence" (*DH* p. 6).

The more power Voldemort secures, the more insecure his followers become. When Harry, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger are captured by Fenrir Greyback and brought to Malfoy Manor, Bellatrix Lestrange reacts not with joy but with terror, unnerved by their unexpected possession of the Sword of Gryffindor and uncertain of the identity of Harry, who is nearly unrecognizable owing to a spell cast by Hermione. When Lucius Malfoy is about to touch his Dark Mark to summon Voldemort, Bellatrix panics: "'STOP!' shrieked Bellatrix. 'Do not touch it, we shall all perish if the Dark Lord comes now!'" (*DH* p. 461). This fear among Voldemort's followers

⁶ For example, although Bellatrix Lestrange is confident that Voldemort considers her his most faithful and trusted follower, she is terrified when he learns of her failure to obtain Sybill Trelawney's prophecy intact (*OOTP* p. 812). Lucius Malfoy also disappoints Voldemort during this mission, and Severus Snape confirms Narcissa Malfoy's fear that Draco Malfoy's impossible assignment to kill Dumbledore is retribution for his father's failure: "The Dark Lord . . . does not forgive easily" (*HBP* p. 34).

works to the advantage of his enemies; it is their delay in summoning Voldemort that gives Harry and his friends time to escape.

3. The Tyrant's Tyrant and the Symposium

There is one aspect of Plato's account of the tyrant's character that does not appear to have a parallel in Rowling's portrait of Voldemort. According to Plato, the tyrant is himself tyrannized by desire (*erōs*), which leads him to commit all sorts of atrocities, such as incest or other forms of sexual misconduct (*Rep.* 571c). Since *Harry Potter* is a children's series, Rowling does not portray Voldemort as an individual consumed by inappropriate sexual desire. Given that Voldemort fits the portrait of the tyrant so very well, however, it would be odd were this one important factor to be entirely missing from his makeup.

One possible resolution to this apparent omission is to interpret improper *erōs* in the sense of excessive self-love. Williams and Kellner employ precisely this strategy. They offer evidence of Voldemort's egocentrism such as his decision to murder Lily Potter; Voldemort's disregard for Snape's request that he spare her life shows that he does not value other people, but only himself. Similarly, they argue, his placement of people under his control in selected positions within the Ministry of Magic demonstrates once again his willingness to use others instrumentally as well as his egocentric desire for power. They also cite Voldemort's creation of the Horcruxes as evidence of his lust for immortality, another sign of excessive self-love.⁷

This resolution might be extended even further by interpreting the creation of Horcruxes by Voldemort as unnatural acts of reproduction, and hence as inappropriate expressions of desire (*erōs*). From this perspective, Voldemort and Nicolas Flamel are alike: both seek immortality by unnatural means. Rather than attempting to secure immortality in his own person through alchemy, however, Voldemort desires to reproduce himself, so that the death of his body does not result in the extinction of his soul. The tyrannical character of Voldemort emerges through a consideration of the means through which he achieves this reproduction. Voldemort's acts of reproduction are unlike those of other humans: he does not direct sexual desire toward another person and he does not seek the generation of a person with a distinct, although related soul. The egoism of Voldemort will not allow him to join himself with another person in the act of reproduction—his reproduction must be asexual, rather than sexual, and thus magical, rather than biological. Moreover, the egoism of Voldemort would never allow him to cede power to another person, even one of his own offspring.

⁷ Williams and Kellner, "Dumbledore, Plato, and the Lust for Power," in *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy*, ed. Bassham, pp. 136-37.

The portrait of Voldemort that emerges from this analysis is reminiscent of Ouranos and Kronos, the early ruling divinities in Greek mythology. Like these figures, Voldemort seeks to rule the universe and displays a lack of control over his physical desires and emotions. Like them, he also fears being overthrown by his offspring and takes drastic, unnatural action to prevent this occurrence. Voldemort, however, goes farther in his quest for power than either of his mythological antecedents; whereas they merely imprison the offspring they obtain through sexual reproduction,⁸ Voldemort avoids this method of reproduction altogether. He even seeks to destroy the one person who (in a magical fashion) inherits qualities from him and is therefore most like a son to him—Harry Potter.

While this interpretation is not without merit and offers intriguing insights, we wish to offer an additional perspective that arises from the works of Plato himself. As Plato indicates in the *Symposium*, desire (*erōs*) is oriented toward beauty, “being a lover of Beauty by nature” (*Symp.* 203c). The speech of Socrates, presented through the voice of Diotima, his teacher in the art of *erōs* (*Symp.* 201d), explores the mystery of *erōs* by organizing the various senses of beauty into a hierarchy, which he then describes as a ladder leading to the ultimate principle of reality. By examining this account from the *Symposium* in more detail, we can see that the perversion of *erōs* characteristic of Voldemort is not merely confined to one sense of beauty, but in fact extends throughout the entire hierarchy of beauty.

a. Beautiful bodies (*Symp.* 210a-c)

Voldemort certainly has little regard for the beauty of his own body. His physical appearance throughout the course of his life is a guide to his increasingly evil nature. At the age of eleven, when Dumbledore first meets him, Tom Riddle is “his handsome father in miniature” (*HBP* p. 269). Yet, when he learns from Dumbledore during this meeting that he is a wizard, his face lights up with a disturbing, twisted form of happiness: “his finely carved features seemed somehow rougher, his expression almost bestial” (*HBP* p. 271). We meet him again at the age of fifteen at an informal gathering of the Slug Club. Among the boys gathered, “[h]is was the most handsome face” (*HBP* p. 369), but when he learns about Horcruxes from Professor Slughorn, he once again demonstrates “the sort of happiness that did not enhance his handsome features, but made them, somehow, less human” (*HBP* p. 499, ellipsis Rowling’s).

In *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry meets the sixteen-year-old Tom Riddle in the form of a Horcrux encased in a diary. This version of Voldemort has committed his first act of sufficiently atrocious evil to generate a Horcrux; the telltale sign of his loss of humanity is “an odd red gleam” that Harry notices in Riddle’s eyes (*CoS* p. 313). After graduating from Hogwarts, the eighteen-

⁸ Ouranos imprisons his offspring within the body of their mother, Gaia, thus preventing their birth, while Kronos swallows his offspring immediately upon their birth from Rhea, thus imprisoning them within his own belly.

year-old Riddle visits the elderly Hepzibah Smith to obtain the Hufflepuff cup and the Slytherin locket. Although he is “more handsome than ever” (*HBP* p. 434), his eyes once again hold a “red gleam” when he sees the cup (*HBP* p. 436) and “flash scarlet” (*HBP* p. 437) when Smith discusses the locket.

Ten years later, Riddle visits Dumbledore to ask for a position at Hogwarts; his physical deterioration signals a transitional phase from Riddle’s earlier appearance to his later identity as Lord Voldemort:

[H]e was no longer handsome Tom Riddle. It was as though his features had been burned and blurred; they were waxy and oddly distorted, and the whites of the eyes now had a permanently bloody look. (*HBP* p. 441)

At this point, Riddle is still mustering his Death Eaters, and while he has already created more Horcruxes, he is not yet ready to commit terrible crimes openly; in short, he has not yet fully come into his own as Lord Voldemort.

Our first introduction to Riddle as Lord Voldemort occurs near the end of *Sorter’s Stone*, when Harry sees Voldemort’s face peering out from the back of Quirrell’s head. It is “the most terrible face Harry had ever seen. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake” (*SS* p. 293). This is the adult Voldemort’s consistent appearance throughout the books, regardless of the condition of his body.

Dumbledore’s summary of Voldemort’s appearance connects this stage of the ladder to the next:

Lord Voldemort has seemed to grow less human with the passing years, and the transformation he has undergone seemed to me to be only explicable if his soul was mutilated beyond the realms of what we might call ‘usual evil’ (*HBP* p. 502, ellipsis Rowling’s)

While this may seem like an unsophisticated fairy-tale approach, in which good creatures are beautiful and bad ones are ugly, from Plato’s perspective a disinterest in the lowest level of beauty is a bad sign—one cannot begin to climb a ladder without stepping on its first rung.

b. The beauty of people’s souls (Symp. 210c)

Voldemort is obsessed with his own soul, especially considered as the principle that animates a living being. He has not, however, sought virtue, which according to Plato consists in the harmony of the soul (*Rep.* 443d). Indeed, in an attempt to ensure his immortality, he fragments his soul through the creation of Horcruxes. Instead of integrating his soul harmoniously, he has *disintegrated* it, achieving precisely the opposite of the harmony that Plato urges us to seek. In *Half-Blood Prince*, we learn that Voldemort has become so distant from the parts of his soul contained in his Horcruxes that he cannot even tell when one of them has been destroyed (*HBP* p. 508).

Furthermore, by fragmenting his soul, Voldemort irreparably damages it, creating, in Dumbledore's words, a "mutilated" soul (*HBP* p. 511). In the reconstruction of King's Cross station in Harry's consciousness, we see the portion of Voldemort's soul that was trapped in Harry's scar represented as a pathetic creature, whimpering in pain and sorrow (*DH* pp. 706-7).

Voldemort exhibits a twisted approach to the souls of others as well. For Plato, a harmonious soul is one governed by reason (*Rep.* 441e). Voldemort, however, seeks to replace the governing principles of other people's souls with his own reason, so that they no longer think for themselves. From a Platonic perspective, Voldemort's actions are inimical to the welfare of the souls of others, especially his followers. Unlike the just ruler, who is more concerned with the interest of his people than with his own benefit (*Rep.* 347d), Voldemort is truly a tyrant who becomes a ruler through his own power, subjugating all others to his self-serving will.

c. The beauty of activities and laws (Symp. 210c)

This sense of beauty essentially describes the art of politics, in which Plato emphasizes the formation of a society that enables its citizens to flourish. Voldemort, however, seeks to establish an oppressive hierarchy in which muggles are at the bottom, half-blooded wizards are in the middle, and pure-blooded wizards are near the top, with himself at the apex. From Plato's perspective, Voldemort's insistence on the superiority of purebloods and half-bloods and the exclusion of muggle-borns runs directly against the reality that people with superior talent may be born to parents of any level of ability. This reality is expressed metaphorically in the *Republic* by the "Myth of Metals" (*Rep.* 415a-c). According to this myth, the quality of a citizen's soul, and hence its proper role in the ideal community, may be expressed in terms of the value of various metals (gold, silver, bronze, or iron). Those with gold or silver in their souls belong in the guardian class; the gold souls would be best suited to rule, while the silver become those who protect and defend the city. Those whose souls contain bronze or iron flourish in lower-ranking occupations such as farming or manufacture. An essential component of the myth is the assertion that the metal in a child's soul need not match the metal in its parents' souls. Consequently, it is crucial to observe children carefully and educate them according to the kind of souls they have, rather than according to parentage. A farmer's child may have a gold or silver soul and should join the ranks of the guardians; a ruler's child whose soul contains iron or bronze should be trained as a farmer or craftsman. To insist upon bloodline alone as the determining factor of each person's role in society would invite disaster for the Republic, as well as for Voldemort's ideal hierarchy. Just as iron parents may have golden children and vice-versa, muggle parents may produce witches and wizards of great ability, while pureblooded magical parents may produce squibs (that is, non-magical children).

In addition, Voldemort's twisted attachment to politics and law is represented symbolically in *Deathly Hallows* by the new statues in the Ministry of Magic depicting the subjugation of muggles and inferior magical creatures by wizards (*DH* pp. 241-42). It is also depicted literally in events such as the trials over which Dolores Umbridge presides, in which muggle-born witches and wizards, as well as those of suspect lineage, are interrogated in an effort to root out those undeserving of the privilege of using magic (*DH* pp. 257-61).

d. *The beauty of various kinds of knowledge (Symp. 210c-d)*

Voldemort is frequently described as being fascinated by knowledge, and it is often made clear that he has sought out information unknown to other wizards. He returns again and again to Hogwarts, a bastion of knowledge, and he chooses items significant to the history of Hogwarts to use as Horcruxes, such as the Hufflepuff cup, the Ravenclaw diadem, and the Slytherin locket.

We should not allow ourselves to be misled into believing that Voldemort is in agreement with Plato on the beauty of knowledge, however. Where Plato emphasizes the priority of the intelligible world, knowledge of which we seek for its own sake, Voldemort concerns himself solely with the perceptible world, knowledge of which he seeks in order to exercise power. Voldemort's quest for knowledge is thus truncated; he chooses not to focus on topics such as the power of love or the extraordinary capacities of house-elves, which would lead to a deeper understanding of magic and reality, but rather on the Dark Arts and the power they enable him to wield.

Unlike Plato's ideal philosopher, who seeks to discover knowledge in shared dialectic with his peers, Voldemort focuses on the unilateral acquisition of knowledge, confident that he is its exclusive possessor. His use of arcane knowledge to create Horcruxes so as to ensure his immortality is the ultimate embodiment of this attitude. Of course, Voldemort is mistaken in his belief that no one else knows about his Horcruxes, and so his improper orientation toward knowledge of the perceptible world proves to be his downfall.

e. *The beautiful itself (Symp. 210e)*

For Plato, the highest sense of beauty is the Beautiful itself, which serves as the ultimate principle of reality, identical with the Good of the *Republic*. The Beautiful itself is the goal of *erōs* (*Symp.* 210e, 211b-c), and when a person discerns this beauty, a remarkable transformation occurs:

Only at that moment, when he sees the way in which Beauty becomes visible, will it become possible for him to beget not images of virtue (since he has not attained a mere image of Beauty), but true virtue (since he has attained true Beauty). Moreover, having begotten and nurtured true virtue, it is possible for him to become a friend of the gods, and if indeed it is possible for anyone to become immortal, it will be possible for him as well. (*Symp.* 212a)

According to Plato, the ascent to the Beautiful itself is the only path to true immortality, and this ascent must be accomplished in a particular fashion: “in the proper sequence and in the correct manner” (*Symp.* 210e). Voldemort’s failure to ascend properly the ladder of beauty condemns him to strive for the false immortality of the Horcruxes, a grotesque caricature of true immortality.

Thus, by examining each sense of beauty within the hierarchy enumerated by Plato in the *Symposium*, we can discern in Voldemort a consistently improper orientation of *erōs*, precisely as required by Plato’s portrait of the tyrant in *Republic IX*.

4. Conclusion

Lord Voldemort is an extraordinarily vivid literary manifestation of the tyrant described by Plato in *Republic IX*. Many of his actions and characteristics, such as the commission of crimes that escalate from petty theft to cold-blooded murder, his treatment of other human beings solely in terms of their instrumental value, as well as the fear and misery he spreads to everyone around him, correspond closely to Plato’s depiction of the tyrannical person. Our exploration of each facet of this portrait, moreover, leads us to recognize that Voldemort, like every tyrant, exhibits improper desire (*erōs*), which extends beyond the mere inappropriate sexual desire cited in the *Republic* to a fundamental perversion of every sense of beauty addressed in the *Symposium*. This recognition not only helps to elucidate the application of Plato’s portrait of the tyrant to Voldemort, but also permits us to attain a fuller understanding of the portrait of the tyrant itself. Thus an examination of literary works, even contemporary popular novels marketed to children, can serve a valuable function in illuminating philosophical treatises from antiquity intended for adults.

