Children's Literature Grows Up

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Children's Literature Grows Up

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Abstract

Children's Literature Grows Up proposes that there is a revolution occurring in

contemporary children's fiction that challenges the divide that has long existed between

literature for children and literature for adults. Children's literature, though it has long been

considered worthy of critical inquiry, has never enjoyed the same kind of extensive

intellectual attention as adult literature because children's literature has not been considered

to be *serious* literature or "high art." *Children's Literature Grows Up* draws upon recent

scholarship about the thematic transformations occurring in the category, but demonstrates

that there is also an emerging aesthetic and stylistic sophistication in recent works for

children that confirms the existence of children's narratives that are equally complex,

multifaceted, and worthy of the same kind of academic inquiry that is afforded to adult

literature.

This project investigates the history of children's literature in order to demonstrate

the way that children's literature and adult literature have, at different points in history,

grown closer or farther apart, explores the reasons for this ebb and flow, and explains why

contemporary children's literature marks a reunification of the two categories. Employing J.

K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels as a its primary example, *Children's Literature Grows Up*

demonstrates that this new kind of contemporary children's fiction is a culmination of two

traditions: the tradition of the *readerly* children's book and the tradition of the *writerly* adult

novel. With the fairy tales, mythologies, legends, and histories that contemporary writers

weave into their texts, contemporary fictions for children incorporate previous defining

characteristics of children's fantasy literature and tap into our cultural memory; with their

sophisticated style, complex narrative strategies, and focus on characterization, these new fictions display the realism and seriousness of purpose which have become the adult novel's defining features.

Children's Literature Grows Up thus concludes that contemporary children's fiction's power comes from the way in which it combines story and art by bringing together both the children's literature tradition and the tradition of the adult novel, as well as the values to which they are allied. Contemporary writers for children therefore raise the stakes of their narratives and change the tradition by moving beyond the expected conventions of their category.

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Introduction

"Hold your tongue!" said the Queen, turning purple.
"I won't" said Alice.
"Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice.
Nobody moved.
"Who cares for you?" said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time.) "You're
nothing but a pack of cards!"
-Lewis Carroll[1]

I'd like to start by playing a little game of comparisons. A dissertation on children's

literature in the guise of a Comparative Literature dissertation (or vice versa) that attempts to

tether together the past and the present, the adult and the child, the real and the marvelous,

the sacred and the profane, will doubtless not proceed in the normal way, so why not begin

with an unorthodox introduction? After all, in the first book of the *Harry Potter* series,

when a tall, silver-haired, high-heeled wizard arrives at Number 4 Privet Drive, where dwell

the mugglest of muggles, J. K. Rowling writes: "Albus Dumbledore didn't seem to realise

that he had just arrived in a street where everything from his name to his boots was

unwelcome."[2] And yet this wizard, so unwelcome and disparaged in one world, is

incredibly eminent and admired in another. It is *always*, as we learn from a foray into

Severus Snape's memories, a matter of perspective. For example, in 1899, in an effort to

save the novel, one critic argued passionately that we put away childish things when we

read. A century later, with the same goal, another critic exhorted us all to read like

"extremely intelligent children." From one perspective the art of fiction and the aspects of

the adult novel have nothing to do with the materials and method of children's literature;

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[1] Carroll, Lewis. *The Annotated Alice*. Martin Gardner, ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000, 124.

[2] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 12.

from another point of view, the two become one and the same, their futures intimately intertwined, like two rivers bound for the same sea.

Today, I argue, there is a revolution occurring in children's literature that challenges the divide that has long existed between literature for children and literature for adults. The children's novel is forging a new identity: its forms, its themes, its style, and even its mission are undergoing a metamorphosis that will affect not only the future of children's literature, but also the future of the novel. My dissertation aims both to clarify how and why this separation has occurred between children's fiction and adult fiction, and to explain how and why the two categories are currently reuniting.

In the last twenty years, owing mainly to the enormous commercial success of J. K. Rowling's novels, there has been considerable thought devoted to how to categorize the *Harry Potter* books and other works of contemporary fiction that, like Rowling's, simply do not seem to belong in the children's section of the library—or at least not *only* in the children's section. Categories like "young adult" and "middle grade" have been created by booksellers and librarians in order to try to find a place and a nomenclature for these works. And yet, somehow, neither term seems to be able to correctly represent books like *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, or Catherynne Valente's *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*. These works do not seem at home next to the popular teen romance *Twilight: Breaking Dawn*, the action-thriller *City of Bones*, the juvenile *Diary of a 6th Grade Ninja*, or even the *Divergent* series, all of which fall into either or both of these two categories. The term "crossover fiction" comes closer, but again, this lumps all works

read by children and adults together, not because of their literary kinship, but because of their popularity.

Yet Rowling's books cannot comfortably be classified as adult literature, or at least it seems that to categorize *Harry Potter* in this way is too threatening to the *status quo* of what can be considered "serious" literature or high art. It is so intimidating, in fact, that in the year 2000 *The New York Times* famously created a separate category for best-selling works of children's literature, unwilling to allow Rowling's novels to continue their seventy-nine week run on the best-seller list. "The time has come," declared Charles McGrath, editor of the Book Review, "when we need to clear some room," and thus the new "Children's Book" list replaced "Advice, How-To and Miscellaneous" at the bottom of the hardcover page.[3] For the most part, publishers and booksellers advocated this change, "complaining that a cluster of popular children's books can keep deserving adult books off the list."[4] To those who protested this new categorization, arguing that, after all, adults read *Harry Potter*, too, McGrath's response was: "if another 'Harry Potter' came along, even if it were only on the children's list, if it were a true crossover book, it would be noticed" by the public. "Being on the kids' best-seller list wouldn't ghettoize it," he claimed. Perhaps McGrath was correct in terms of popularity and book sales. Dubious as his assertions may seem, it is possible that

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[3] It is interesting to note that Rowling's books remained on the *Times*'s best-seller list (though after July 23, 2000, they were relegated to the children's book list) for ten years. And, perhaps even more telling, in 2004, the Book Review introduced yet another categorization because Rowling's books were again "clogging the children's list." This time, a list was created for children's "series" books, which "ignored the sales of individual titles and instead tracked each series as a whole."

[4] Personally, I would argue that if a book was only able to make it on the list if *Harry Potter* didn't count in the mix, then that book is probably not as good as it ought to be and certainly no better than Rowling's.

the new category may not have affected the total number of Harry Potter books sold.[5]

However, I would argue that McGrath was incorrect in assuming that by being

acknowledged "only on the children's list," books like *Harry Potter* were not ghettoized as

less serious literature than the books that now fall under the *Times*'s category of "Hardcover

Fiction." Just as the word "(Adult)" is implied in the category title, implicit in the decision

to displace books like *Harry Potter*, even if their appeal to an adult audience is perfunctorily

acknowledged, is a judgment that these works of fiction, because they are children's books,

are not of equal intellectual or cultural value as novels for adults.

But perhaps even employing this type of list, a list which reveals more about book

sales than literary value, is going about things the wrong way. Perhaps a better measure

would be to examine the BBC's "Big Read" List. In April 2003, the BBC began the search

for the United Kingdom's best-loved novel and compiled a list of the most nominated titles.

First on the list was J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*; second, Jane Austen's *Pride

and Prejudice*; third, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. The "Big Read" does not

concern itself with book sales, but rather with books that have earned lasting esteem in the

nation. But, again, perhaps this list is misleading when it comes to a book's literary merit, a

possibility intimated by Philip Pullman himself. Gratified but astonished that his own

novels were even included, let alone positioned in third place, Pullman expressed his delight

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[5] Although it is impossible to know whether or not this is true. If there were no differentiation between children and adult best-sellers, would more adults have read *Harry Potter*? I would argue that, in all probability, yes. Adults who decide to read the books on the *Times Best Seller List* would have been more likely to read *Harry Potter* if it hadn't been relegated to another—lesser (as implied even by McGrath with his use of the word "only")—category.

that *Pride and Prejudice* came in second, saying "It's one of the greatest novels that's ever

been written."[6] But when asked if he was also a fan of Tolkien, his response was surprising:

> "No, not really. He is a great storyteller, there's no doubt about that.
> But I don't think he does with the novels what great novelists do,
> which is to tell us the truth about what it feels like to be a human
> being.
> They are not great novels. They might be great stories, which is a
> different thing."[7]

Here Pullman touches on our problem: that the people who submitted their favorite novels to

the survey perhaps misunderstood the category "novel." But then the real question

becomes: what makes a novel a great novel but a great story only a story?

Scholars from E. M. Forster to Ian Watt to David Lodge to James Wood have

discussed at length what aspects of the novel elevate this kind of adult fiction to an art form,

yet what has been absent from these rigorous works of criticism is the same kind of

examination of fiction for children. Children's literature, though it has long been considered

worthy of critical inquiry, has never enjoyed the same kind of extensive intellectual attention

as adult literature. In universities, it is rare to see more than a couple of courses on

children's literature, and usually these are survey courses taught by a member of faculty who

is not primarily an expert on fiction for children. Children's literature scholars, though our

numbers are increasing, are still few and far between, not nearly as prevalent as, say,

scholars of Victorian literature, though, oddly, there have been millions more children and

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[6] "The Big Result: Oxford's winning writers." *BBC.com*, December 2003.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/oxford/features/2003/12/big_read.shtml.

[7] Ibid.

fictions written for children than there have ever been Victorians or novels written by

Victorians. But because children's literature has not been considered to be *serious* literature

or high art, it is not often studied or judged in the same way. Instead, it is more frequently

used comparatively, as in, "This is not a *novel*, this is a *children's book*." For example, in

his recent critique in *The New Yorker* of Donna Tartt's 2013 novel, *The Goldfinch*, James

Wood explains that Tartt's work of fiction is most definitely not art by asserting that, "[The

novel] is a virtual baby: it clutches and releases the most fantastical toys. It's tone,

language, and story belong in children's literature."[8] Here, Wood employs the category of

"children's literature" to demonstrate the disparity between Tartt's fiction (what he terms

"the management of continuous artifice") versus *serious* fiction (the "disclosure of a

meaningful reality").[9] Shortly after Tartt won the Pulitzer Prize, Wood complained to

Vanity Fair, "I think that the rapture with which this novel has been received is further proof

of the infantilization of our literary culture: a world in which adults go around reading *Harry

Potter*."[10] Thus, what makes Pullman's claims about Tolkien so surprising is not the fact that

he declares Tolkien a storyteller rather than a novelist, but that he even considers works of

children's literature part of this conversation.

I mention Wood's assertions about *The Goldfinch* here in order to disclose one of my

primary goals in writing this dissertation. It is my intention to take one more step in the

direction of including works of children's literature in the conversation of the *cognoscenti*. I

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[8] James Wood, "The New Curiosity Shop: Donna Tartt's "The Goldfinch," *The New Yorker*, October 21, 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/10/21/the-new-curiosity-shop.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Evgenia Peretz, "It's Tartt—But is it Art?" *Vanity Fair*, July 2014, http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2014/07/goldfinch-donna-tartt-literary-criticism.

do not adhere to the notion that because a work of literature is written for children it is therefore *ipso facto* disqualified as *serious* literature and thus cannot be accorded the same level of academic merit. Though, indeed, I believe that some works of children's literature are more serious, more complex, and more literary than others (as some fictions for adults are more serious, more complex, and more literary than others), to use "children's literature" as a benchmark that must be surpassed in order to attain the status of high art is, I think, not only insulting to so many creators of incredible fictions, but it is also obtuse; it reveals, quite frankly, an ignorance of an entire literary category that has existed alongside adult literature—influencing it and being influenced by it—for centuries. It betrays critical *aporia* or, as Dumbledore would put it, it betrays knowledge that remains "woefully incomplete." A theory of the novelistic genre that does not include children's novels, I contend, is not a complete theory. Scholars of the novel who, like Wood, regard the category as part of lower culture and reference it only to disparage the non-literary in this way casually disregard children's literature's equivalent capacity to adult literature for linguistic complexity, aesthetic sophistication, and thematic radicalism. Thus, to say that because adults are reading *Harry Potter* our literary culture is now "infantilized" again reveals misplaced blame and, moreover, a lack of actual familiarity with contemporary children's literature. I believe that Wood is wrong: the *Harry Potter* series *is* high art, *is* serious literature, and thus deserves to be recognized as such. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, Rowling has written her novels in such a way that they grow with the child reader; the significance of the language, characters, settings, and themes of each installment only yield to the reader's understanding when s/he has pursued and reflected upon each mysterious thread of the great web of story Rowling has spun. In this way, Rowling's novels destabilize the reader's

expectations by presenting a multiplicity of cultural codes and ideological indicators for the reader to uncover. Thus, Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is a culmination of two traditions: the tradition of the *readerly* children's book and the tradition of the *writerly* adult novel. It is because the two come together so seamlessly in her work that her novels appeal to both audiences at the same time, without conspiring with one against the other. With the fairy tales, mythologies, legends, and histories that she weaves into her texts, Rowling incorporates previous defining characteristics of children's fantasy literature and taps into our cultural memory; with her technical skill, she gives us the realism and verisimilitude that attempt to portray all the varieties of human experience—and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective—which has become the adult novel's defining feature. Therefore she has not, as Bloom attests, contributed to the dumbing-down of culture. Rather, she has, to borrow a phrase from Maria Tatar, "inaugurated a new literary impulse."[11]

This assertion, controversial as it may be, brings me to the second goal of my dissertation, which is to demonstrate that J. K. Rowling's series is not only *serious* literature, but it is also instigating a renaissance within the children's literature category and, indeed, within the novelistic genre. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series along with Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, Catherynne Valente's *Fairyland* books, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, and numerous other

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[11] Maria Tatar, *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 173.

Children's literature scholar Maria Tatar writes that J. M. Barrie "inaugurated a new literary impulse" with his play *Peter Pan* and his novel *Peter and Wendy*. I believe Rowling, nearly a century later, is taking up Barrie's mantle and changing children's literature as we know it.

works conceived at the end of the 20th century mark a new era of children's literature where child readers and child characters are not only allowed access to what Neil Postman[12] calls "adult secrets and realities," but also asked to find solutions to problems hitherto confined to the realm of their mature counterparts. For example, in the novels that compose the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Philip Pullman attempts to reimagine Milton's *Paradise Lost,* one of the most complex and radical works of literature ever written. In his Carnegie Medal acceptance speech, Pullman stated his belief that there are "some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book."[13] Hence, for Pullman, works of children's literature can be equivalently sophisticated and revolutionary as adult novels, and, indeed, as his trilogy demonstrates, can even surpass works of adult fiction in their complexity and radicalism. After all, Lyra, the heroine of *His Dark Materials,* is a reincarnation of Eve, whose discovery of her sexuality is the only way to save humanity from the irrevocable finality of death. God is powerless in Pullman's universe and, unlike Nietzsche who merely declared God's death, Pullman makes his readers witness God's decay into senile impotence and shows them that God's murder (by characters so insignificant and peripheral to the story that they have no names) is, in the end, meaningless. This, then, is not a text that announces itself as simple or unsophisticated. But

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[12] For Postman, the idea that childhood was disappearing was problematic and the change was blamed on television. Shame was "demystified and diluted" and he thought that it might lead to a new barbarism in the present day. Children's literature seems to now be taking a different tact. By allowing their protagonists access to adult secrets, they are actually returning the world to a place of safety.

[13] Philip Pullman, "Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech," *Philip Pullman: His Dark Materials*, 1996, http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/author/carnegie.php.

what is more, the author claims that the only reason he was able to write such a novel was the very fact that it would be a part of the children's literature category.

Thus, with this new kind of children's literature, we witness the effacement of the boundary that has long separated children's literature from the literature of adults. These writers have broadened children's literature's identity in order to deepen and elevate the category. They have instigated a reimagining of what constitutes children's literature because they have changed the way in which children's literature is written and received. In their novels, they adopt a narrative style that mimics the rhetorical effects of adult fiction, they confront themes and explore issues that have been solely under the jurisdiction of adult literature for over a century, and they unapologetically embrace both realism and the marvelous, making real things incredible and fantastic things realistic. In this way, they rescue children's literature from detractors who refuse to acknowledge it as "serious" literature or high art—or, in other words, they present their novels as literature that is equally complex, multifaceted, and worthy of the same kind of academic inquiry that is afforded to adult literature.

As I will explain more fully in my second chapter, in the past decade, while there have been a few books written about a change in children's literature, those studies focused mainly on themes. Therefore, in an effort to fill this gap, I am more concerned with the literariness of new fantasy literature written for children and by demonstrating the existence of a *writerly* kind of children's narrative, I hope to show that not only is there a new thematic boldness in these contemporary texts, but also an emerging stylistic sophistication.

Part One of *Children's Literature Grows Up* examines key persons and key events in the history of children's literature that shaped the category. In Chapter One, I examine the

essays of two critics of the novel, Henry James and Harold Bloom, in order to clarify how the separation between children's literature and adult literature occurred and I explain what this means for the future of contemporary children's fiction. In Chapter Two, I investigate the history of children's literature in order to demonstrate the way children's literature and adult literature have, at different points in history, grown closer or farther apart. I explore the reasons for this ebb and flow, and explain why contemporary children's literature marks a reunification of the two categories.

Part Two concerns itself with the changes in structure, style, and intent that are occurring in contemporary children's literature. Therefore, in Chapter Three, I begin my exploration into the way contemporary children's literature writers employ traditional literary elements like intertextuality as techniques in order to establish in their works a seriousness of purpose and create a new kind of literature for children that is sophisticated in its narrative style. In order to provide my readers with an example of the aesthetic transformations occurring in contemporary children's novels, in Chapter Four I demonstrate the way Rowling adopts and adapts literary nonsense in her Harry Potter series in order to both establish her works as part of the children's literature tradition and yet also align them with the adult novelistic tradition through the complex and sophisticated style of her spell language. In Chapter Five, I demonstrate that contemporary children's fiction's power comes from the way it combines story and art by bringing together both the children's literature tradition and the tradition of the adult novel and the values to which they are allied. By examining the way contemporary texts for children move beyond the expected conventions of works of fantasy, I argue that writers like Rowling raise the stakes of their narratives and change the tradition.

Part Three of *Children's Literature Grows Up* is concerned with the way that the hero is reimagined in contemporary texts for children in order to promote a more believable narrative through characterization. Therefore, in Chapter Six, I demonstrate that Rowling departs from several of the key defining markers that Perry Nodelman claimed were crucial to the genre. In contemporary texts for children like J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels, writers are complicating the simple and recognizable story patterns that have typified the category and, by doing so, they are shifting the focus of their novels to the creation of believable and complex characters. While writers like Rowling indeed exploit some of the motifs and story structures that have typified narratives in the children's literature category, they are no longer primarily preoccupied with action and events. Instead, the more sophisticated structure of the plots underwrites character revelation. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I argue that by placing Rowling's narrative alongside works like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, we are able to see how Rowling also anchors her narrative in the adult literature tradition. Through the flexibility, ingenuity, and dexterity that she demonstrates in creating a complex and ever-developing identity for her protagonist, Rowling is able to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood by showing us the world through one solitary yet ever-evolving perspective and by advocating for "psychological realism" in her text for children.

It is important to make a few basic distinctions about the area of children's literature that I will be addressing in this dissertation. While a revolution may also be occurring in children's picture books, illustrated story books, and "beginning readers," it would take another dissertation at least as long as this one to thoroughly examine and determine if and how these books are also celebrating the expansion of their audience to include both the

child to whom the book is being read and the adult who is reading the book, appealing to both by operating on different planes of meaning and symbolism. In addition, owing to the nature of these types of literatures for children—i.e. because they are usually instructional, didactic, or introductory books that are meant to expose children to reading as well as to the world around them, helping them to become familiar with the people, places, creatures, behaviors, emotions, and phenomena they will encounter in their young lives—these books, perhaps simply due to page and vocabulary restraints, do not delve as deeply into the lives of their characters or the intimate details of their imaginary worlds as do novels written for older, more adept readers. This is not to say that picture books and other stories for beginning readers should be undervalued or belittled for their targeted audience or their seemingly unsophisticated style and story lines. On the contrary, many of the most revolutionary books for children are a part of these categories, such as Maurice Sendak's brilliant story of the liberating power of imagination, *Where the Wild Things Are,* and Crockett Johnson's powerful treatise on curiosity and world-building, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*. However, while the agenda or ultimate endgame of these books may be the same as that of a fantasy novel, the execution and resulting books are, undeniably, different.

It is for similar reasons that I do not include nonfiction or realistic fiction for children in this dissertation. The rationale behind my exclusion of nonfiction books for children is, of course, obvious: these kinds of narratives are not invented by their authors. Rather, nonfiction children's books concern themselves not with possible worlds, but instead with the actual world and its people and phenomena, and are understood to be historically or empirically true (at least at their time of composition). For similar reasons, I do not include works of realistic fiction because, while these texts *are* invented by their authors, the stories

told are still contingent on the plausibility of the characters and setting as well as reliant on the physical possibility of the imagined events. Thus, they lack the bidimensionality of fantasy literature, which locates itself somewhere between realism and the marvelous. I am interested in the in-between-ness of fantastical fictions because, first, they are more likely to be dismissed as part of lower culture due to their kinship, however distant, with adult genre fictions and, second, because I believe that the space in which fantastic works of fiction operate actually lends itself to more literary freedom. Nevertheless, though I will not include realistic fiction in this dissertation, I believe that this literary category has played a crucial part in bridging the gap between children's literature and adult literature that emerged in the 20th century. In fact, because books like Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia,* Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons,* and, most recently, John Green's *The Fault In Our Stars* and R. J. Palacio's *Wonder* acknowledge the capacity of child readers to grapple with the realities of accidental death, abandonment, terminal cancer, and discrimination, they also blur the boundary between literature for children and literature for adults.

Thematically, these books belong to a literature of victimhood, which is also on the rise in children's literature. Not since the novels of Charles Dickens has their been such a focus on the child as the victim of adults or of social forces. For the purposes of this dissertation, what is most interesting about the literature of victimhood is that the positioning of the child as a casualty of contemporary society's indifference, bigotry, and violence is counterbalanced by the positioning of these same children as the redeemers of adults. Though I find this peculiar polarization interesting, I will not be exploring it in this dissertation as it is already a popular topic of discussion in many current studies of

children's literature (see, for example, Kathryn James's *Death, Gender, and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature*).

In the following chapters, while I will also refer to other contemporary novels for children in order to establish that Rowling is not alone in writing revolutionary children's fiction, I will focus on her series for three reasons: First, because her novels are so pervasive and have been the most widely read, she has influenced other writers who began their works in the late 1990s-early 2000s; second, due in part to the sheer enormity of her series, she is able to incorporate all of these new things; third, and most importantly, though there are many writers for children who are now part of this literary renaissance, Rowling was arguably the first, and perhaps more importantly, I believe she is the best.

Finally, I recognize that, with notable exceptions, my dissertation examines children's literature and its history and evolution predominantly from an Anglo-American perspective. The reason for this limited focus is, simply, that while I believe the revolution occurring in English and American children's fantasy literature will eventually become a phenomenon that will spread to other nations, the impulse to challenge the divide between literature for children and literature for adults began, I contend, in the United Kingdom and migrated first to the United States. In addition, I would like to argue that, while these contemporary works of children's literature benefit from a rich and varied literary tradition that is not exclusive to these two nations, the revolution that is now occurring is dependent upon and was made possible because of what had happened before to literature for children in these two countries. I therefore intend to primarily examine English and American children's books in order to discover the roots of this revolution and the classic predecessors to this renaissance. What is occurring in children's literature today is dependent upon what

happened in the genre before the rupture between what suitable fiction for adults looked like and what suitable fiction for children looked like. Thus, my next chapter begins with the critic I see as being located at the mid-point of my chronology, or perhaps he is rather the point of a pivot, having written two crucial essays about the adult novel during the Golden Age of children's literature that irrevocably changed the future of the novel for both children and adults.

"Begin in the middle and work outwards," prompts her sister, when Beauty attempts to explain her life with the enchanted Beast in Robin McKinley's *Beauty*, "Don't be stuffy."[14] So, in the following chapter we will turn to the words written a hundred years ago by a novelist and critic who didn't seem to want anything to do with children's fiction at all, and who, indeed, wished nothing more fervently than to dissociate the novel from children altogether. Because, as Alice discovered, one must begin somewhere to get somewhere, so let's take the Wolf's shortcut and get there faster by making a little wrinkle in time.

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[14] Robin McKinley, *Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978), 207.

Part I

Chapter One
The Future of the (Children's) Novel
Or
Can Harold Bloom Be Wrong? Yes.

In this chapter, I examine the essays of two critics of the novel, Henry James and Harold Bloom, in order to clarify how the separation between children's literature and adult literature occurred and explain what this means for the future of contemporary children's fiction.

In 1899, Henry James wrote a brief but impassioned essay called "The Future of the Novel," in which he surveyed the field of what he called the "prolonged prose fable."[15] James began his indictment of the novel's degraded state by lamenting the fact that, at the turn of the twentieth-century, "boys and girls" constituted the majority of people who sustained the genre's existence. He declared:

> Nothing is so striking in a survey of this field, and nothing to be so much borne in mind, as that the larger part of the great multitude that sustains the teller and the publisher of tales is constituted by boys and girls; by girls in especial, if we apply the term to the later stages of the life of innumerable women who, under modern arrangements, increasingly fail to marry—fail, apparently, even, largely, to desire to. It is not too much to say of many of these that they live in a great measure by the immediate aid of the novel— confining the question, for the moment, to the fact of consumption alone. The literature, as it may be called for convenience, of children is an industry that occupies by itself a very considerable quarter of the scene. Great fortunes, if not great reputations, are made, we learn, by writing for schoolboys, and the period during which they consume the compound artfully prepared for them appears—as they begin earlier and continue later—to add itself to

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[15] Henry James, "The Future of the Novel," *The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and Practice of Fiction*, ed. William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 242.

> both ends. […] The published statistics are extraordinary, and of a sort to engender many kinds of uneasiness. The sort of taste that used to be called "good" has nothing to do with the matter: we are so demonstrably in presence of millions for whom taste is but an obscure, confused, immediate instinct.[16]

In this early paragraph, as he anxiously marvels over the "industry" of the novel and its extraordinary "statistics," it is with both nostalgia and nausea that James insists that the nineteenth-century novel had become something that was ingested rather than digested, "consume[d]" by "millions" for whom discernment of the literary was a merely an impulse, indiscriminate and desultory. Persisting in his belief that the novel should hold a mirror up to culture, and that that mirror should show the reader an authentic image as various and vivid as life itself, James objects to the way his contemporary British and American novelists have presented but a superficial prose picture with their works. According to James, the incompleteness of these novels is largely due to the fact that their authors either mistrusted all but the most guarded treatment of delicate subject matters, or, indeed, most often avoided mention of them altogether. As a result of these self-imposed limitations, James argued, novelists had made a great and inexcusable mistake: they had misunderstood the most fundamental and crucial quality of their chosen literary form.[17] The novel's supreme value, according to James, is its freedom; it can, as he claims in his essay, "do simply everything"; its elasticity is infinite, its subject is the whole of human consciousness, and it should therefore be uninhibited by rules and restrictions.[18]

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[16] Ibid., 243.

[17] Ibid., 248.

[18] Ibid., 246.

However, at the turn of the twentieth century, James tells his readers that novels have become fettered by their creators' timidity and adherence to propriety. In *The Future of the Novel* he contemns novelists' squeamishness when it comes to revealing uncomfortable truths (most notably sexuality and violence) about the human experience. He continues:

> The high prosperity of fiction has marched, very directly, with another "sign of the times," the demoralisation, the vulgarisation of literature in general, the increasing familiarity of all such methods of communication, the making itself supremely felt, as it were, of the presence of the ladies and children—by whom I mean, in other words, the reader irreflective and uncritical.[19]

Thus, James lays the blame for the uncertainty of the novel's future at the feet of novelists who write with women and children in mind. For James, who here equates *maturity* with *discernment*, the crime of the novelist is his penchant to protect and even to invest in the naïveté of these readers at the expense of readers who do possess the intellectual capacity and who do have the learning to be reflective and critical—in other words, at the expense of the sophisticated, unsentimental, highly-educated adult male. These members of the *cognoscenti* were the readers who James believed could appreciate the novel's boundless power and collaborate with the author, yet these were also the people, much to James's dismay, who were continuously limiting the novel by demanding that it be appropriate for a family readership.[20]

Neither were James's fellow critics free of culpability or safe from his reproach:

> The fact that in England and in the United States every specimen that sees the light may look for a "review" testifies merely to the

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[19] Ibid., 245.

[20] Ibid., 248.

point to which, in these countries, literary criticism has sunk. The review is in nine cases out of ten an effort of intelligence as undeveloped as the ineptitude over which it fumbles, and the critical spirit, which knows where it is concerned and where not, is not touched, is still less compromised, by the incident. There are too many reasons why newspapers must live.[21]

Here we see that the critic is to James almost as blameworthy as the novelist. Because, as James tells his readers, practically every novel that appeared on the scene was then indiscriminately reviewed in newspapers and magazines, this democratic inclusion of all prose works made it increasingly difficult for the public to differentiate the "good" novel from the "bad." Therefore, recalling his arguments in his earlier essay, "On Criticism," James here again calls for a new critical elite who would ignore works of fiction that maintained the *status quo*—in other words, which were too sentimental or too moralistic in their attitudes toward the human experience—in favor of more "experimental" novels that would push the boundaries of the genre and give a more accurate first-hand impression of life. To James's mind, novels in this form—the form to which his own novels adhered— were the only works worthy of critical attention and yet, as James knew all too well, these novels were also the recipients of the harshest critiques at the end of the nineteenth-century.

Thus, at the outset of his essay, the future of the novel looked very bleak to Henry James. Yet, though the absence of theory, the hesitation to experiment, and the reduction of fiction to a "story" were cause enough for James's total disillusionment with the genre at the end of the nineteenth-century, James, ever the resilient critic, was still able to anticipate an optimistic future for the novel. As he continues his assessment of the "prolonged prose fable" in the latter part of his essay, James finds hope both in the increasing freedom of the

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[21] Ibid., 245.

1890s and, ironically, in the very groups which he initially arraigns for corrupting

literature.[22] At the time of his essay's publication, James asserted that women and young

people were engaged in a redemptive rebellion that would eventually force changes in the

novel that would assure it a future.[23] He writes: "The simple themselves may finally turn

against our simplifications; so that we need not, after all, be more royalist than the king or

more childish than the children."[24]

 In this way, James astutely identified two things that were both crucial to the future

of the novel, but that could also, as will be explained later in this essay, be profoundly

important to the future of contemporary children's literature. The first was that women were

not fundamentally inferior to men, but that they had been miseducated by society; the

cultural ideal of female "innocence" and "natural delicacy," James intimates, was in fact an

insistence upon female ignorance. William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin write:

> Society treats women like children because many members of both
> sexes value "purity" and docility at all costs. This malformation of
> woman, and not any limitation innate to her, is what James is
> striking at when he joins "ladies and children" together as "the
> reader irreflective and uncritical."[25]

James foresaw a time in the near future when women would finally be able to enjoy the

same educational and societal benefits as their male counterparts, and he predicted that when

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[22] William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin, Commentary on "The Future of the Novel," by Henry James. *The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and Practice of Fiction*, ed. William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 253.

[23] James, "The Future of the Children's Novel," 253.

[24] Ibid., 249.

[25] Veeder and Griffin, Commentary on "The Future of the Novel," 253.

that time came, women would not continue upholding the "precautionary attitude" of men.

He writes:

> It bears on this that as nothing is more salient in English today, to fresh eyes, than the revolution taking place in the position and outlook of women—and taking place much more deeply in the quiet than even in the noise on the surface demonstrates—so we may very well yet see the female elbow itself, kept in increasing activity by the play of the pen, smash with final resonance the window all this time most superstitiously closed.[26]

James realized that, in shielding women from some of the more private or harsher realities of the human experience, society was, in actuality, merely trying to protect itself by perpetuating its own ideals of innocence. Women, James predicted, would not hold with such nonsense forever.

Second, James recognized that the future of the novel depended upon how it handled its relationship to children. "By what it shall decide to do in respect to the 'young,'" James declared, "the great prose fable will, from any serious point of view, practically see itself stand or fall."[27] For James, the choice was clear: instead of continuing to obey its "unreasoning instinct of avoidance," the novel needed to confront the reality of the human condition with precision and honesty. He looked to the past and claimed that:

> While society was frank, was free about the incidents and accidents of the human constitution, the novel took the same robust ease as society. The young then were so very young that they were not table-high. But they began to grow, and from the moment their

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[26] James, "The Future of the Children's Novel," 250.

[27] Ibid., 248.

little chins rested on the mahogany, Richardson and Fielding began
to go under it.[28]

As a result, though Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, the "inventors" of the modern

novel, contributed positively to the growth and success of the "great prose fable," James also

believed that they did the novel a disservice by promoting a common readership of children

and adults through the avoidance or concealment of mature topics. He complained that this

led to an "immense omission" in fiction, with, as he puts it:

too many sources of interest neglected—whole categories of
manners, whole corpuscular classes and provinces, museums of
character and condition, unvisited; while it is on the other hand
mistakenly taken for granted that safety lies in all the loose and
thin material that keeps reappearing in forms at once ready-made
and sadly the worse for wear.[29]

By the end of the nineteenth-century, the novel therefore needed to change or it would

eventually wear so thin that it would disintegrate altogether. The novel simply could not

continue in this repetitive manner and survive because, as James explains, two of the great

conditions for fiction had changed: the novel was older, and so were the young. Everything

that the novel could explore within the strictures of a common readership had been done *ad

nauseam*. It was time to move on and address the entirety of human experience so that when

children grew up, they would have a different kind of fiction to challenge them.

Interestingly, James notes, it was the new generation of adult readers who recognized the

truth to his claims:

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 249.

> … the curious thing is that it appears to be they themselves who are making the grave discovery. 'You have kindly taken,' they seem to say to the fiction-mongers, 'our education off the hands of our parents and pastors, and that, doubtless, has been very convenient for *them*, and left them free to amuse themselves. But what, all the while, pray, if it is a question of education, have you done with your own? These are directions in which you seem dreadfully untrained, and in which *can* it be as vain as it appears to apply to you for information?' The point is whether, from the moment it is a question of averting discredit, the novel can afford to take things quite so easily as it has, for a good while now, settled down into the way of doing.[30]

When children of the nineteenth-century grew up and encountered what was supposedly "adult" literature, they found it wanting. Because writers of fiction still wrote with a common readership in mind, instead of being freer, more challenging, and more complex, novels continued to bear a striking resemblance to the literature they read as children. Instead of creating and experimenting with new forms and themes, the adult novel merely repeated what had been done in the past. In other words, though its audience had reached maturity, the novel had not. Consequently, in order for the novel to "grow up," James argued that the novel must first cut ties with fiction for children. As Felicity Hughes explains in *Children's Literature: Theory and Practice*, James believed not that formerly prohibited topics should be discussed in front of the children, but, instead, that the child should be excluded so that the adults could discuss such matters among themselves.[31]

As countless scholars of the novel have illustrated, the criticism of Henry James changed the course of the novel and helped elevate its status to high art. The twentieth

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[30] Ibid., 249.

[31] Felicity Hughes, *Children's Literature: Theory and Practice*, ELH, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Autumn, 1978), 548. I am greatly indebted to Hughes for her insight into the way James's essays shifted literary authority.

century marked a new era for the genre in which it achieved not only a high level of stylistic and psychological sophistication, but it also succeeded in escaping the previous strictures imposed by a common readership through experimentation with radically new forms and themes. For example, in pursuit of greater freedom of expression, during the first three decades of the 20th century, novelists like E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf experimented with new techniques like the stream of consciousness style in their attempt to more accurately portray human thought and emotion. In addition, Freud's discovery of the unconscious inspired writers to delve deeply into the minds of their characters as well as to represent inner reality even more vividly than outer reality. The conflict between human intellect and human sexuality had never before been so explicitly represented as in the 20th century novels created by modernist writers like D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce. On both sides of the Atlantic, World War I and its attendant disillusionment led to a more explicit description of the dislocation of values and of the disintegration of family. Expatriate novelists like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote about the inability to find significance in anything other than immediate physical experience as well as the corruption underlying the American dream. In France, Marcel Proust wrote *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-1927), which not only offered readers a detailed portrait of a modern Frenchman's life but also described the genesis of an artist and his investigation into the meaning of experience. In addition, Henry James's prediction that women would not long uphold the precautionary attitude of men and would instead revolt against the idea of their "natural delicacy" and "innocence" was quickly realized. The suffragist movement in early 20th century England insisted on gender equality in the eyes of the state; innovator Gertrude Stein reimagined the literary *salon* and inspired her contemporaries to make new and radical

art; Simone de Beauvoir's analysis on the status of women, *The Second Sex*, highlighted and insisted upon an end to their oppression. Beginning in the 1930s, existentialist writers like de Beauvoir, and also, notably, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote fictional explications of the individual's relationship to God and/or the universe, inquiring into the nature of being and analyzing the importance and necessity of the religious and ethical decisions facing each human entity. These works were harbingers of the great conflict that would grip humanity in the following decade and, indeed, the political and social upheaval that occurred in Russia and Europe in the years leading up to, and during, World War II served as inspiration for novels concerned with social realism, class relations, and societal conflict.

In keeping with this desire for authenticity, in the years following World War II the majority of writers for adults became disillusioned with previous representations of reality in the novel because the horrors that the "greatest generation" had actually experienced far outstripped earlier fictional representations. The atrocities committed by the Nazis, the threat of the atomic bomb, the assassinations and riots of the 1960s in America, the Vietnam War, and the anxiety surrounding the Cold War prompted a change in the novel—a shift toward the fantastic. During the second half of the 20th century, French novelists like Georges Perec, Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Nathalie Sarraute embraced a new narrative style that they called the *le nouveau roman*, which, in turn, heavily influenced the radical experiments with visual style, editing, and narrative ambiguity that characterized Left Bank cinema. Robbe-Grillet, like Henry James before him, wrote a series of essays on the future of the novel and the necessity of innovation, encouraging writers to again abandon features of the novel that had become "conventional" in favor of greater and incessant

experimentation with style and technique. In the United States, writers like Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and Philip Roth answered this call to action by combining the techniques of fiction with reports of true events in their poignant works of creative nonfiction, while Kurt Vonnegut's dystopian and antiauthoritarian novels blurred the lines between satire and science fiction. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, during the latter part of the 20th century magical realism became a global literary phenomenon. Latin American writers Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez, British Indian writer Salman Rushdie, and American writers Toni Morrison, Louis Erdrich, and Angela Carter, to name just a few, embraced a narrative style that introduced fantastic elements into otherwise realistic narratives in an effort to approach an even more poignant truth about the human experience.

But what about children's fiction? What happened once the categories were again divided? Felicity Hughes writes that within twenty years of the publication of "The Future of the Novel":

> the views expressed in it were widespread, in particular the view that the serious novel is one that children cannot read was generally accepted among writers and critics. The impact that this exclusion has had not only on the development of children's literature but on attitudes towards it is still overwhelming. The segregation of adult's and children's literature is rationalized, even celebrated on all sides. It has assumed the status of a fact, a piece of knowledge about the world, that children read books in a different way and have to have special books written for them.[32]

Thus, Henry James may have saved the novel for adults, but perhaps at the cost of childhood reading. One such casualty of James's success was Francis Hodgson Burnett, an author who

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[32] Ibid., 548.

enjoyed notable critical acclaim for novels such as *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877) and

Through One Administration (1883). She received high praise from both American and

English critics: Alfred, Lord Tennyson remarked that a passage in *Through One*

Administration was "the finest piece of English he had ever seen," and in 1883, an essayist

in the *Century* called her one "of the seven writers who hold the front rank to-day in general

estimation."[33] However, by the end of the century, the work for which she was best known

was *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, published in 1886. The novel recounts the story of Cedric Errol,

a young American boy who is discovered to be the heir to a crotchety English earl and who,

by traveling to England and charming everyone he meets with his grace, innocence,

manliness, and spirituality, transforms his grandfather's life and the lives of those around

him for the better.   Indeed, the story is as sentimental as it is predictable. However, as some

scholars today claim, the story also provides valuable insight into the post-Civil War

mentality of the United States. Jerry Griswold makes the case that Fauntleroy spoke to the

need for "myths about domestic harmony, myths that would legitimate American

genealogy" and "reassert order and continuity rather than flounder in a state of perpetual

revolution."[34] As Clark puts it, "If the American Cedric Errol is the legitimate heir to his

grandfather, the Earl of Dorincourt, and hence is Little Lord Fauntleroy, then America is

legitimate heir to Britain."[35] In addition, Clark argues that *Fauntleroy* spoke to the concern

for masculine identity, which was undergoing contested change at the time:

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[33] Beverly Lyon Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 17. I am greatly indebted to Clark for her leads to both early and contemporary commentary on Burnett.

[34] Ibid., 18.

[35] Ibid.

> As for the ideals that Fauntleroy embodied, he provided—to both elite critics and general readers—a brilliant, albeit contradictory, synthesis of competing ideals of masculinity, including those of the Christian gentleman, the self-made man, the masculine primitive, and the newly emerging social-economic elite.[36]

Very shortly after its publication, *Fauntleroy* became immensely popular with both children and adults. In addition to the approbation of the general public, it also received high praise from critics like Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell, two men who were, as Clark puts it, "nineteenth-century custodians of high culture."[37] Their remarks expressed sentimental fondness for Fauntleroy, but also admiration for Burnett's style and diction. Clark writes:

> What Fauntleroy had provided in the late nineteenth-century was, first of all, a figure that spoke to both adults and children, a figure that maintained the conjuncture of child and adult audiences, even if older readers were likely to justify their interest by stressing what younger readers would learn from Fauntleroy.[38]

And yet, despite initial critical approbation, the innocence of Fauntleroy, his artless charm, and even the very readability of the novel itself began to undermine Burnett's place as a revered novelist. Clark tells us that at a time when "serious" literature and "popular" literature began to separate—primarily due to Henry James's theories about the novel—"the success of *Fauntleroy* pushed someone who had previously been able to combine critical

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[36] Ibid., 22.

[37] Ibid., 19.

[38] Ibid., 22.

acclaim and a modicum of popular success into the second camp."[39] By the beginning of the twentieth century, Burnett's novel was "generating considerable critical distaste."[40]   The Fauntleroy story was banished to the nursery in order to make way for novels that were less sentimental and preachy. Thus, despite his inherited nobility, Fauntleroy, with his angelic features and his candid demeanor, was identified by the new, Jamesian custodians of high culture not as representative of the sophisticated elite, but as the ideal Victorian child. Therefore, in addition to this casualty in his war against common readership, James was also an abettor of the stigmatization of adults reading children's books. After all, if children read books in a different way than adults and therefore must have their own literature, it follows that adults should not read children's books except *with* a child or risk being considered childish, immature, or even unintelligent.

But before we discuss how James might be able to posthumously redeem himself, let us turn to an article published, curiously enough, on July 11, 2000, almost exactly a century after the publication of James's "The Future of the Novel."[41] In his essay for *The Wall Street Journal*, "Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be Wrong? Yes.," Harold Bloom attempts to pick up James's critical mantle by predicting the future of the novel at the turn of the twenty-first century. Though the adult novel and the children's novel had been dissociated from each other for almost a hundred years, Bloom's article addresses the enormous commercial success of the *Harry Potter* series, in particular the phenomenon of adults reading these

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[39] Ibid., 19.

[40] Ibid., 25.

[41] Interestingly, his article was written as a response to *The New York Times's* decision to remove the *Harry Potter* novels from their "Best Seller" list.

books independent of their children. Like James, Bloom is uneasy about the path the novel

has taken during the latter part of his lifetime and thus his article calls attention to what he

suggests is the novel's corrupted state by simultaneously attacking J. K. Rowling's series,

belittling the twenty-first century readers of both adult and children's literature, as well as

rebuking contemporary platforms for literary criticism, most notably *The New York Times*.

(Suffice it to say, Bloom was not trying to win any popularity contests.)

Bloom begins what can only be described as a sanctimonious rant against Rowling

by comparing himself to Hamlet[42], the lone voice of truth, taking up arms against an

indomitable crowd of people who are, to his mind, woefully ignorant of the reality of their

situation and of their own intellectual shortcomings. He is incredulous that Rowling has

achieved both commercial and critical success and declares that the reason for it cannot be

due to her literary skill (which he considers negligible); it must, he therefore concludes, be

due to something else entirely. The rest of the article is Bloom's attempt to explain how and

why *Harry Potter* "asks to be read."[43]

Though he admits to having only read the first book (*Harry Potter and the

Philosopher's Stone*) Bloom is still quick to deem the whole of Rowling's *Harry Potter*

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[42] In the introduction to his 2001 anthology, *Stories and Poems for Extremely Intelligent Children of All Ages*, Bloom calls Hamlet "perhaps the most fascinating person in all literature," so we can assume his comparison of himself to Shakespeare's hero is not intended to be a modest one.

[43] Harold Bloom, "Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be Wrong? Yes.," *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition, (11 Jul. 2000): A. 26, http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/docview/398705631?accountid=11311

series[44] "inadequate" and lacking "an authentic imaginative vision."[45] To Bloom, the

scholar who wrote *The Anxiety of Influence*, the latter supposed shortcoming is, of course,

Rowling's greatest crime; Rowling is the *ephebe* who fails in her attempt to surpass the

masters and consequently will never achieve literary immortality for herself. Bloom writes:

> Rowling has taken "Tom Brown's School Days" and re-seen it in
> the magical mirror of Tolkien. The resultant blend of a schoolboy
> ethos with a liberation from the constraints of reality-testing may
> read oddly to me, but is exactly what millions of children and their
> parents desire and welcome at this time.
>   In what follows, I may at times indicate some of the
> inadequacies of "Harry Potter." But I will keep in mind that a host
> are reading it who simply will not read superior fare, such as
> Kenneth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows" or the "Alice"
> books of Lewis Carroll. Is it better that they read Rowling than not
> read at all? Will they advance from Rowling to more difficult
> pleasures?[46]

Echoing James, Bloom is dismayed by the fact that a book that appeals to the *common*

schoolboy[47]—a book that, he believes, fails to successfully approach or imitate reality yet

also fails to provide a satisfactory escape into fantasy—has revitalized the novel's existence

in contemporary culture. After an interlude in which Bloom gives a brief and unflattering

summary of *Philosopher's Stone*, he comments on "the aesthetic weaknesses" of Rowling's

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[44] At the time of Bloom's article, only four of the seven *Harry Potter* books had been published, and though Bloom tells his readers not to "persevere" with Potter, this admonishment comes without knowledge of what happened after Harry's first year at Hogwarts and without awareness of Rowling's overarching plan for the novels' complexity to grow with the child reader's abilities. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was published just days before Bloom's article, on 8 July 2000.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] As opposed to the "extremely intelligent" child he touts in his anthology, *Stories and Poems for Extremely Intelligent Children of All Ages*.

series, declares that "her prose style, heavy on cliché, makes no demands upon her readers,"

and doubts that *Harry Potter* will ever prove to be a classic of children's literature.[48] He

considers Rowling's series to be inferior to works for children written during earlier eras,

most notably the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and indeed further remarks that her

books, like contemporary adult "pop" fiction novels, have no value outside of briefly

liberating a population held hostage by digital distraction:

> How to read "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone"? Why, very
> quickly, to begin with, perhaps also to make an end. Why read it?
> Presumably, if you cannot be persuaded to read anything better,
> Rowling will have to do. Is there any redeeming educational use to
> Rowling? Is there any to Stephen King? Why read, if what you
> read will not enrich mind or spirit or personality? For all I know,
> the actual wizards and witches of Britain, or America, may provide
> an alternative culture for more people than is commonly realized.
>   Perhaps Rowling appeals to millions of reader non-readers
> because they sense her wistful sincerity, and want to join her
> world, imaginary or not. She feeds a vast hunger for unreality; can
> that be bad? At least her fans are momentarily emancipated from
> their screens, and so may not forget wholly the sensation of turning
> the pages of a book, any book.[49]

Bloom thus identifies Rowling's success as purely the result of a mass desire for escapism.

The novels themselves, he claims, are unremarkable, and only serve as temporary diversion

for a society he sees as obsessed with the alternative realities presented by television, film,

and video games. Yet, despite his dismissal of *Harry Potter* as a mere fad, Bloom continues

to be troubled by Harry's growing audience of adults, children, scholars and critics alike.

He concludes by saying:

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

And yet I feel a discomfort with the Harry Potter mania, and I hope
that my discontent is not merely a highbrow snobbery, or a
nostalgia for a more literate fantasy to beguile (shall we say)
intelligent children of all ages. Can more than 35 million book
buyers, and their offspring, be wrong? yes, they have been, and
will continue to be for as long as they persevere with Potter. A vast
concourse of inadequate works, for adults and for children, crams
the dustbins of the ages. At a time when public judgment is no
better and no worse than what is proclaimed by the ideological
cheerleaders who have so destroyed humanistic study, anything
goes. The cultural critics will, soon enough, introduce Harry
Potter into their college curriculum, and The New York Times will
go on celebrating another confirmation of the dumbing-down it
leads and exemplifies.[50]

With this rather pessimistic attitude, Bloom predicts a grim future for both children's

literature and adult literature. He identifies the 35 million people who had read the *Harry*

Potter books at the time of his article not as readers, but as "book buyers," implying that

Harry Potter books are not novels, but instead simply a commodity that, like the latest

iPhone, have inspired a fever of consumerism. These "buyers" are therefore not *really*

readers, but "reader non-readers," the barely-literate majority that dictates the values of what

Bloom calls our "our dominant counter-culture."[51] Indeed, by using the term "offspring"

instead of "children," Bloom even nastily intimates that the young people who read these

books, in addition to their parents, do not even deserve to be described as members of the

human race.

Finally, Bloom, indignant and alarmed at the thought of books like *Harry Potter*

being studied at the university level, also expresses concern that prominent platforms for

criticism like *The New York Times* have lowered their standards of discernment, and, in so

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

doing, have negatively influenced both public and scholarly judgment. With his "discomfort," Bloom again adopts James's nostalgic and nauseated tone as he tries to bring attention to his own idea of what children's fiction should be, making a (rather amusing and shameless) plug for his own forthcoming anthology, *Stories and Poems for Extremely Intelligent Children of All Ages*, which was published shortly thereafter, in 2002.

In his anthology, Bloom has collected forty-one stories and tales and eighty-three poems that he believes are not only accessible to intelligent adult and child readers, but that also serve as a sort of "gateway literature" that will prepare them for the more difficult works of adult fiction, in which category he notes Shakespeare, Chekhov, Jane Austen, and, of course, Henry James.[52] Interestingly, as indicated by his selections for his anthology, Bloom promotes a return to the common readership that James so disparaged a century earlier. In this way, Bloom inadvertently calls attention to James's crucial mistake: though he was so astute in recognizing the malformation of women by society, understanding that women were indeed capable of reflection and critical thinking, James did not extend his critique to the miseducation of children. Instead, James perpetuated the cultural ideal of childhood innocence by dissociating the novel from its family readership and reinforcing the notion that children—readers "irreflective and uncritical"—lacked the capacity for aesthetic discernment and could never be attuned to the technical strategies of prose fiction.

Thus, though I believe James was correct in his prediction that the novel's future depended upon how it handled its relationship to the young, I also believe that he proposed the wrong solution. With his rhetorical deployment of childhood from the literary scene,

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[52] Harold Bloom, *Stories and Poems for Extremely Intelligent Children of All Ages* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 21.

James encouraged, to borrow Bloom's phrase, the "dumbing-down" of literature for children. If the novel for adults became increasingly more complex, more experimental, and more uninhibited in the century following James's essay, children's literature fell victim to the opposite extreme. As I will explain in greater detail in the next chapter, after the First World War and the end of the so-called Golden Age of children's literature, with only a few notable exceptions, novels for children became less inventive, their language became less challenging and less sophisticated, their characters became more stereotypically childish, and their worlds narrowed their spheres. Thus, by excluding them from the conversation in order to talk amongst ourselves for the past century, I believe we have done both children and their literature a disservice. Bloom, in his anthology, attempts to rectify this mistake. Echoing many of the catchphrases of his *Wall Street Journal* article, Bloom writes in the introduction to his anthology:

> Anyone, of any age, reading this volume will see quickly that I do not accept the category of "Children's Literature," which had some use and distinction a century ago, but now all too often is a mask for the dumbing-down that is destroying our literary culture. Most of what is now commercially offered as children's literature would be inadequate fare for any reader of any age at any time. […] The obstacles to reading are, to some extent, merely a matter of fashion, or of inadequate examples set by parents for children. What is read remains the pragmatic question, the difference that will make a difference.[53]

Here I find common ground with Bloom; the broad category of "Children's Literature" as it exists today has lost its usefulness. The works that have previously come under this enormous umbrella are too various and too distinct from one another to comprise the same

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[53] Ibid., 16.

category. Bloom therefore offers his readers a sample of stories and poems that have not

only defied categorization, but that have also survived the vicissitudes of fashion. In

addition, as an alternative to "A Selective Anthology of Children's Literature," he gives this

literature a new description and defends the title of his compilation, saying:

> My title is meant to be precise: What is between these covers is for
> extremely intelligent children of all ages. Rudyard Kipling, Lewis
> Carroll, and Edward Lear are blended with Nathaniel Hawthorne,
> Nicolai Gogol, and Ivan Turgenev, because all of them—in the
> poems and stories I have chosen—make themselves open to
> authentic readers of any age. There is nothing here that is difficult
> or obscure, nothing that will not both illuminate and entertain. If
> anyone finds a work here that does not yield immediately to their
> understanding, I would urge them to persevere. It is by extending
> oneself, by exercising some capacity previously unused that you
> come to a better knowledge of your own potential."[54]

As evidenced by his confidence that readers of any age can be "authentic" readers, Bloom,

unlike James, believes in children's capacity for aesthetic discernment, their aptitude for

collaboration with the author, and their ability to think critically while reading. Instead of

exiling children to the nursery where they will find more of the same bland and

undemanding literary fare, Bloom encourages children to remain with the grown-ups.

Understanding that each reader, whether s/he is a child *or* an adult, will approach the texts

with his or her own unique intelligence and experience, Bloom encourages the reader to

persevere even if s/he initially finds the text challenging. As a result, Bloom touches on

what I believe to be the crucial issue. Our society has assumed, for a century now, that a

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[54] Ibid.

work of literature for children must be what Roland Barthes calls a *readerly* text.[55] In other

words, a text for children must yield itself immediately to the reader's understanding

without the work of interpretation. The child reader becomes simply a site to receive

information because meaning in these texts is permanent and pre-determined. In addition,

these works of literature attempt to conceal any elements that would open up the text to

multiple meanings by using standard representations and prevailing signifying practices.[56]

Thus, the child reader is not able to interact with the text because the author has presented

the child with a book whose narrative style and thematic content is so familiar, so unvaried,

and so traditional that its meaning is self-evident, requiring no interpretation on the part of

the reader. In this way, as Bloom so bitterly attests in his *Wall Street Journal* article,

children's literature has indeed supported the view of texts as disposable commodities and

promoted the commercialized values that have held humanistic study hostage in recent

years.

     Yet I believe, and I think Bloom would agree with me, that we have long been

operating with a false bifurcation and under a false assumption. As I have explained,

James's decision to separate literature for adults from literature for children was not based

upon scientific evidence that children were incapable of critical reflection, but merely due to

an insistence upon childhood ignorance in order to preserve a cultural ideal of innocence. In

the above paragraph, Bloom reminds us that children *can* decode and interpret, just like their

adult counterparts. There are no innate intellectual shortcomings in children, they have just

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[55] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller with a note on the text by Richard Howard, 1st American ed. (New York: Noonday Press, 1975).

[56] Ibid.

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lacked the opportunity to extend themselves. Consequently, I think we could argue that children's literature *can* and *should* require interpretive effort, can and should operate in the *writerly* mode, revealing those elements that the *readerly* children's texts have for so long attempted to conceal. In this way, the child reader can now assume a position of control and can adopt an active role in the construction of meaning. And, if we can turn child readers from passive receptors to active interpreters by offering them complex literature, we can defy the commoditization and commercialization of the children's novel.

Yet I feel a "discomfort" with the way in which Bloom attempts to solve the problem of the "dumbing-down" of literature. With his anthology, Bloom proposes that we return to works of literature written *before* this bifurcation between adult and children's literature occurred. The majority of texts that Bloom includes were written before the First World War; in other words, before the theories of Henry James became so pervasive that adult and children's literature became distinct categories. Not one text Bloom selected for his anthology was written during or after World War II. Thus, with his omission of children's novels written during the lifetime of his child readers (or even during the lifetime of their parents), Bloom sends a clear message that the stories and poems for highly intelligent children are definitely not contemporary ones.

Perhaps Bloom is correct about the majority of children's literature written after its Golden Age. Perhaps there really has been a dearth of inventive and intelligent children's literature in the past hundred years. Or perhaps these kinds of novels have simply been overlooked due to our cultural notions about childhood. Whatever the case may be, even if he is correct in assuming children's literature experienced a Dark Age of sorts, I think Bloom makes a crucial mistake when it comes to contemporary children's literature. As he

was so quick to judge an entire series based on his own misreading[57] of its first novel, I

believe that Bloom also makes a premature judgment about contemporary children's fiction

and thus fails to recognize an entirely new kind of literature.

Bloom, I believe, is wrong about Rowling and her readers, but it is important to keep

in mind his reluctance to read new children's literature, because it is precisely this

disinclination that has led to his crucial misunderstanding of contemporary children's

fiction—of its inventiveness, complexity, and brilliance. Due to this reluctance, when faced

with the problem of what to do about the future of literature, Bloom, like his precursor

James, proposes the wrong solution.   And, ironically, I think it is Henry James who can best

illuminate the crux of the issue. He writes:

> There are many judges, doubtless, who will hold that
> experiments—queer and uncanny things at best—are not necessary
> to it, that its face has been, once for all, turned in one way, and that
> it has only to go straight before it. If that is what it is actually
> doing in England and America the main thing to say about its
> future would appear to be that this future will in very truth more
> and more define itself as negligible.[58]

Bloom's solution, as evidenced by his anthology, is for children and adults to look to past

works of literature in order to find "good" literature. While this is admirable, and, indeed, I

agree that the stories for children written during the Golden Age of children's literature were

brilliant in their literariness and extraordinary in their inventiveness and should continue to

be read by children today, I do not think that all that can be done has been done.   This kind

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[57] Here I use the term "misreading" in the literal sense (i.e. to read inaccurately), not the kind of productive misreading that Bloom promotes in his *Anxiety of Influence*.

[58] James, "The Future of the Novel," 247.

of protective nostalgia is in fact hampering the growth of the genre. Indeed, I believe that this is why children's literature failed to achieve its potential during the past century, because readers, writers, and critics alike became more and more conservative with what was "allowed" in a children's book, refusing to experiment and push the boundaries of the category. Like the stories and poems in Bloom's anthology, acceptable children's literature maintained a family resemblance for more than a century and, unfortunately, that resemblance became more and more standardized. But the novel, James tells us, "can never be at the end of its tether until it loses the sense of what it can do," which is, of course, everything; "it moves in a luxurious independence of rules and restrictions."[59] I contend that by tenaciously holding on to past forms of children's literature, Bloom and, indeed, many other critics lose sight of this supreme value of the novel. Even Bloom could not argue that the literature he offers his extremely intelligent children of all ages is free of limitations. While the stories and poems are perhaps challenging in their literariness, most retain the same thematic reticence and cannot achieve the freedom of expression that characterized adult novels during the twentieth century. Therefore, while Bloom's solution is to look to the category's past, my solution is to look to its present and its future, because there, I believe, the children's novel will finally achieve the freedom that has long been solely the privilege of the adult novel.

Contemporary children's writers, notably J. K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, Neil Gaiman, Lemony Snicket, Suzanne Collins, Diana Wynne Jones, and Brian Selznick, have introduced a new literary era by creating literature for children that displays confidence in the child's capacity for aesthetic discernment and critical thought while also allowing the

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[59] Ibid., 246.

child access to all of the "accidents and incidents" of the human condition. Rather than accepting reigning opinions about what constitutes children's literature—e.g., that it must remain unsophisticated in its language and structure, that it must prefer action to exploring the interiority of its characters, that it must refrain from directly confronting adult themes or radical and controversial subject matters, or that it must abandon realism in order to commit fully to the fantastic (or vice versa), etc.—they have instead, with their novels, actually changed the identifiable features and defining markers by which children's literature was previously defined.

In "The Future of the Novel," Henry James dreamed of a writer who would save the genre from the threat of extinction by rebelling against its culturally imposed constraints and addressing the entirety of the human experience. A century later, contemporary writers like Rowling are engaged in this same rebellion, this time on behalf of the children's novel. "Children know such a lot now,"[60] Peter Pan once told us, and, a century later, in the Age of Information, they know even more. So shouldn't their literature rise up to meet them? Isn't it time for children's literature to grow up?

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[60] J. M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 27.

Chapter Two
There and Back Again: Children's Literature, A Journey

In this chapter, I investigate the history of children's literature in order to demonstrate the way children's literature and adult literature have, at different points in history, grown closer or farther apart. I will explore the reasons for this ebb and flow, and explain why contemporary children's literature marks a reunification of the two categories.

"Sir Wind," September said, when she had recovered herself and her eyes had adjusted to the darkness, "I want to ask you a question, and I want you to answer me seriously and not call me any pretty names or tease me."
-The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making[61]

The goal of the present chapter is to demonstrate the means by which children's literature has developed in Western culture and how that development is tied to the cultural construction of childhood and its relationship to adulthood. In an effort to illuminate the reasons why adulthood, childhood and, consequently, the literatures that belong to these two categories, have been placed in binary opposition to one another, I intend to show how literature for children changed with the so-called "invention of childhood" in the 18th century, how it was then separated from adult literature, and how it has recently begun to revolt against this divide in order to again become a category that effaces boundaries.

And I say "again" because this is not the first time in history that children are reading the dark materials of adults. For example, in his *Confessions*, St. Augustine reflects upon his life as a schoolboy and the way he was instructed to memorize parts of the *Aeneid*, a text

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[61]Catherynne Valente, *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making* (New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2011), 12.

teeming with infidelity, suicide, lust, and violence.[62] For the children of Ancient Greece and

Rome, the study and recitation of excerpts from Homer's *Iliad*, the odes of Horace,

Euripides's tragedies, and Menander's comedies were central to their education and eventual

entry into public life.[63] Children's literature scholar Seth Lerer tells us that throughout the

history of childhood reading, innumerable passages from works of adult literature have been

extracted into manageable portions and assigned to different age groups for two purposes:

docere et delectare, to teach and to entertain.[64] "Ever since there were children," writes

Lerer in his *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter* (2008),

"there has been children's literature. Long before John Newbery established the first press

devoted to children's books, stories were told and written for the young, and books

originally offered to mature readers were carefully recast or excerpted for youthful

audiences."[65] Lerer's *Reader's History* details how successive periods defined the literary

for children and observes that, up until the latter part of the 18th century—from the *Aesopica*

in Ancient Greece and Rome to the hagiographies of saints in medieval Europe, from the

Pilgrim's Progress in infant America to the widespread popularity of the Robinsonades—

literature for adults and literature for children were often comprised of the same stories.

Therefore, the idea of fictions appealing to a general audience is not a new notion, but rather

part of a literary continuum that has, over time, experienced ebb and flow. In the following

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[62] Seth Lerer, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 22.

[63] Ibid., 17-18.

[64] Ibid., 20.

[65] Ibid., 1.

pages, I will endeavor to explain why by the mid-twentieth century the divide between

literature for children and literature for adults had become so wide as to challenge the

existence of what I call "grown-up" children's literature, or, in other words, literature for

children that is as sophisticated, challenging, and complex as literature for adults.

A Book Of One's Own: Locke, Rousseau, Newbury and Childhood as a Separate Stage of Life

While in the above paragraph I make reference to Lerer's declaration that children's

literature has always existed, and, what is more, that children in antiquity were learning

passages from texts that were written for a general audience, in order to trace a continuous

line from antiquity to the present day it is important to call attention to the way texts like the

Iliad or the *Aeneid* were modified or adapted to suit the needs and, indeed, the interests of

children. Indeed, this method of adjusting a piece of literature to make it appropriate for and

intelligible to children has been perhaps the most universal and ongoing of practices in

creating texts for children. For example, contrary to historian Jacques Le Goff's assertion

that the "utilitarian Middle Ages" had no time to devote to children, [66] Lerer tells us that in

fact many of our most familiar genres of children's literature (the lullaby, the primer, the

catechism, etc.) emerged because of a desire to introduce children to the worlds of court,

commerce, and cloister that dominated the landscape of the Middle Ages through

meaningful and comprehensible texts.[67]

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[66] Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization*, 288 in Ariès, Philippe, *Centuries of Childhood*, transl. Robert Baldick (London: Pimlico, 1996), 31.

[67] Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 60.

But it was with the introduction of John Locke's philosophical theory of education

and his redefinition of the self through a continuity of consciousness that he and his

subsequent supporters profoundly changed not only the governing epistemology of

children's schooling, but also their literature.[68] In his 1693 pivotal work, *Some Thoughts*

Concerning Education, Locke famously compared the child to a *tabula rasa*, or a blank

slate, upon which society would inscribe morality and culture. Instructing the landed gentry

on the education of their sons, Locke also compared the parent to a governor whose task it

was to ensure that the child grew successfully into adulthood by providing him with

discipline and a strict moral code. Both of these ideas were heavily influential to child-

rearing for the next two centuries. The adult concern with a child's education in discipline

and morality was made manifest by the number of books published with an intention of

teaching children how to live—and especially how to die—well. For example, in 1671,

Locke's contemporary, James Janeway, published a hugely popular collection of tales

entitled *A Token for Children*, whose subtitle was *An exact Account of the Conversion, Holy*

and Exemplary Lives, and Joyful Deaths, of several young Children. In this work, though

Janeway differs from Locke in that he makes explicit his belief that children are born tainted

by original sin, Janeway's childrearing attitudes accord with Locke's: children should not be

handled gently, but should be taught obedience and faith, and should be spared no

punishment if it would help to bring about the child's conversion and eventual salvation.

Other books published in the following half century, such as *The Divine Songs Attempted in*

Easie Language for the Use of Children (1715) by Isaac Watts (a work that, interestingly,

was later parodied by the great champion of fantasy, Lewis Carroll, in his *Alice's*

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[68] Ibid., 105.

Adventures in Wonderland) were written in a similar vein and, to quote childhood scholar

Colin Heywood, were "no less preoccupied with punishment and pain."[69] In this way,

because the emphasis on teaching children to be valuable citizens was coupled with a

determination to make children aware of their susceptibility to sin and ignorance, adults

became more careful in writing and choosing texts that not only suited the child's needs but

were also *suitable* texts for children. As with prior works in Western culture, these texts

differed in tone and style from literature for adults. Now, however, there was also an ever-

growing difference in content that consequently increased the divide between literature for

children and literature for adults.

In 1762, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau continued to make the child

the focal point of philosophical interest when he wrote *Émile ou De l'éducation*. In this

work, Rousseau insisted that children were fundamentally different from their adult

counterparts and, in order for them to remain untouched by the "black morals" of

civilization, he prescribed a "purely negative" education in which all books except *Robinson

Crusoe* were banned and all formal instruction was delayed.[70] Rousseau also introduced the

child as a being to whom parents must have a profound emotional attachment and

established the idea that children have an innate human goodness, a conception of the child

that, as will be demonstrated below, was later perpetuated by Romantic writers and visual

artists who began depicting children in ways that emphasized their immaturity and

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[69] Colin Heywood. *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 33.

[70] Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Émile* (London: Dutton, 1974), 93-95.

innocence, rather than indicating their future adult personalities.[71] In this way, Colin

Heywood writes, "these artists reflected the increasing separation of the worlds of adulthood

and childhood in the bodies of their subjects, contrasting the innocence of the child with the

experience of the adult."[72] In her influential work, *The Case of Peter Pan or The*

Impossibility of Children's Fiction, Jacqueline Rose notes the implications of these two

philosophers on the continuing conceptualization of childhood and society's abiding

approach to children's fiction:

> The earliest children's writers took from Locke the idea of an
> education based on the child's direct and unproblematic access to
> objects in the real world, an education that would by-pass the
> imperfections of language (Newbery, 1744, 1756; Watts, 1782).
> They took from Rousseau the idea that it is sexuality which most
> totally sabotages the child's correct use of language and its exact
> knowledge of the world. […]Children's fiction emerges, therefore,
> out of a conception of both the child and the world as knowable in
> a direct and unmediated way, a conception which places the
> innocence of the child and a primary state of language and/or
> culture in a close and mutually dependent relation. It is a
> conception which has affected children's writing and the way that
> we think about it until this day.[73]

Locke's and Rousseau's ideas,[74] along with the advent of John Newbery's

increasingly child-oriented literary press, marked a shift in the books published for, assigned

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[71] Heywood, *A History of Childhood*, 24-25.

[72] Ibid., 25. A portrait entitled *The Age of Innocence* (c. 1788) by artist Joshua Reynolds is a notable example of this kind of new depiction of the child.

[73] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan Or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 8-9.

[74] It should be noted that the images of an innocent and natural childhood posited by Rousseau did not go wholly uncontested in the years that followed his *Émile*. The Puritan emphasis on original sin remained alive and "made adults anxious about children," an anxiety that was later "reinforced by the evangelical revival at the end of the eighteenth century" (Cunningham 66). However, both of these movements still served to separate childhood and adulthood, situating the child as the pre-adult

to, gifted to, and chosen by child readers and also perpetuated the bifurcation of children's

and adult literature, a small fissure that would gradually widen over the next two centuries.

Capitalizing on the emerging pedagogic and philosophical notions of childhood being a

separate and critical stage of life and on the Enlightenment view of the child as a reasoning

being, Newbury saw the purpose and commercial value of publishing books that, as

children's literature scholar Rebecca Knuth claims, "spoke directly to children and offered

them practical advice, laced with good cheer and optimism."[75] Newbery's *A Little Pretty*

Pocket-Book,[76] which appeared on July 18, 1744, was the first of many successful books

meant exclusively for children. And, as children's literature continued to separate itself

from adult fiction, to whittle itself into a unique and identifiable literary category, the books

that comprised it also changed in their forms and functions. Newbery made the conscious

decision to make his *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* "child-sized," smaller than other novels

published concurrently for adults, a trend that has continued in children's publishing

(especially with picture books meant for toddlers) to this day. Additionally, he chose bright

colors, expensive copperplate engravings, and, for some editions, gilt covers in order to

appeal to children's taste, thereby effectively distinguishing his volumes from the dull and

cheap appearance of earlier chapbooks for children. This change in appearance ensured the

commercial success of Newbury's books as these new editions became coveted items. But

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who must be stifled and schooled in order to later become a useful adult.   In addition, some parents
took Rousseau's ideals a little too far and made the child more of a luxury item, to be spoiled and
coddled. Again, this further separated the child from the adult.

[75] Rebecca Knuth, *Children's Literature and British Identity* (Plymouth, UK: 2012), 15-16.

[76] For an extra two pence, the book came with either a red ball or a pincushion in an effort to appeal
still further to young boys and girls.

in addition to inaugurating an appeal to children's aesthetic taste, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* also heralded the way that the function of books for children would be altered in the subsequent century. Recognizing and catering to the child's interests, energies, and attention spans, which differed from those of adults, Newbery included poems and proverbs in his book, as well as an alphabet song. Though (especially to contemporary readers) Newbery's new publication retained a didactic impulse, it made an attempt to attract the child on a pleasurable level as well. Thus, with changes in the way children were viewed by publishers, educators, and parents, the 17th and 18th centuries gave rise to the notion that childhood should be treated as a separate stage of life and thus contributed to the bifurcation between literature for children and literature for adults.

Childhood and The Romantics: Innocence and Family Reading

The Romantic conception of childhood, which added to Rousseau's notion of youthful innocence and its connection to nature, first appeared during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and further contributed to the separation of adult and child. Barbara Garlitz has demonstrated that William Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807) was crucial to the Romantic movement as well as the vision of childhood it endorsed.[77] Garlitz writes that the poem:

> functioned throughout the nineteenth-century British culture as at once synecdoche and authority for the new conception of childhood, appearing via citation, quotation, or allusion not only throughout poetry but also in sermons, journal articles, polemics

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[77] Barbara Garlitz, "The Immortality Ode: its cultural progeny," Vol. 6 of *Studies in English Literature* (1966), 639-649.

for children's rights, and the writings of pioneering social workers like Mary Carpenter and Thomas Barnardo.[78]

Indeed, as Hugh Cunningham declares, "it is difficult to exaggerate the influence of Wordsworth's Ode."[79] Under its impact, children came to be thought of as having deeper perceptions of moral truths and a keener aesthetic sensitivity than their adult counterparts. In addition, the child's connection to nature would not only, as Rousseau declared, teach the child experience, but would also implant in the child "the foundations of moral virtue and of beauty, and these in turn would shape the adult life."[80] No longer entertaining the notion of original sin, Wordsworth promoted the idea that infancy and childhood were endowed with godliness, being fresh from Heaven, and were also therefore "a force of innate goodness"[81]:

> *Not in entire forgetfulness,*
> *And not in utter nakedness,*
> *But trailing clouds of glory do we come*
> *From God who is our home:*
> *Heaven lies about us in our infancy!*[82]

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[78] Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the End of Childhood," *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations*, ed. James Holt McGavran (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 24.

[79] Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 69.

[80] Ibid., 68.

[81] Ibid., 69.

[82] Wordsworth, William. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*. ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 59.

Wordsworth's other poem, "My Heart Leaps Up" or "The Rainbow" (March 26, 1802), also gave shape to Romantic notions about childhood that would dominate the rest of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

> *The Child is the father of the man,*
> *And I could wish my days to be*
> *Bound to each by natural piety.*[83]

Cunningham describes these lines as the central message of Romanticism; that childhood was transformed from being a "preparatory phase" in the shaping of an adult, and instead became an ideal, "the spring which should nourish the whole life."[84] Childhood was consequently set up in the mind of society as a lost realm that was crucial to fashioning the adult self and to ennobling the human spirit. Cunningham writes that Romanticism "embedded in the European and American mind a sense of the importance of childhood, a belief that childhood should be happy, and a hope that the qualities of childhood, if they could be preserved in adulthood, might help redeem the adult world."[85] Thus, Cunningham explains that because of this new interest in children's bodies and minds and the way they developed, childhood, and all that it came to represent, developed a new significance in Western culture.[86] In an essay on the child in the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Elizabeth N. Goodenough writes how the harsher and more skeptical notions about childhood changed under the influence of Romanticism:

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500,* 68.

[85] Ibid., 72.

[86] Ibid., 70.

Romantic ideas about the child's divine innocence permeated
transcendentalist thought, educational reforms, the Sunday School
movement, the growth of pediatrics, and the spawning of a new secular
literature for and about children. The Calvinist notion of infant damnation
was finally discarded, and gentler discipline was advocated in the child-
rearing manuals, now addressed to mothers, which proliferated after
1830.[87]

Because of the new importance of childhood accorded by adults, for the next century and a

half, as more and more books were published with a target audience of children in mind,

both England and America witnessed the increasing divergence of children's literature and

adult literature. On both sides of the Atlantic, secular texts for children (though still packed

with moralizing undertones) found an eager audience toward the mid-19th century.

Preeminent writers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Greenleaf Whittier, Herman

Melville, William Cullen Bryant, and Nathaniel Hawthorne began writing works of fiction

for children, in addition to and separate from their publications for adults, with great

success.

It is true that many of the most acclaimed authors of the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries continued to write works of fiction that were intended for both children

and adults. However, the possibility of this overlap is due to the fact that, as Beverly Lyon

Clark explains, there was still an expectation (even if it was no longer a reality) that it was

necessary for all literature, and fiction in particular, to provide "genteel readers" with

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[87] Elizabeth N. Goodenough, "'Demons of Wickedness, Angels of Delight': Hawthorne, Woolf, and
the Child," in *Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*, ed.
John L. Idol, Jr. and Melinda M. Ponder, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1999), 228.

"models for emulation."[88] Clark writes in *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* that, "to be considered suitable for children, a work might be held to such a standard with some stringency, but all literature was expected to nourish our aspirations for the ideal."[89] "The eighteenth century novel," writes Felicity A. Hughes, "had been seen in England as at least potentially *family* reading."[90] Hughes goes on to explain that the debate on the relative merits of eighteenth century authors revolved around the question of which novels were "more appropriate for the moral, social and literary education of British youth."[91] This mode of criticism continued late into the nineteenth century, with novels being judged by their suitability for the hypothetical young reader.[92] Owing to this association with the family and despite, or perhaps, *because* of its status as popular literature, the novel was considered to be a lower form of art when compared to other genres.

But it is also true that during this period there were murmurs of discontent with the restricted conditions on the novel genre that were the result of this family readership, a dispute that, as I explained in the previous chapter, came to a head in the 1880s. At this time, the proponents of the novel became engaged in a struggle to demonstrate that it was not simply entertainment but high art, and were determined to, as Felicity Hughes puts it, "live down the stigma of being a "low" form"—a very difficult task as the novel lacked the

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[88] Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*, 22.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Hughes, *Children's Literature: Theory and Practice*, 543.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

long and distinguished classical ancestry of poetry and drama.[93] Consequently, by the end of the nineteenth century, adult readers began to desire a more candid, less moralizing, and more complex literature for themselves, though many perhaps remained dubious of permitting such a thing for children. Indeed, Hughes writes that, "by the turn of the century it was clear that at least some English novelists would no longer allow themselves to be held responsible for the moral welfare of the nation's youth."[94]

Laying the Groundwork for a New Era: Charles Dickens and the Child Hero as a Force for Social Reform

One of the most popular novelists of the nineteenth century, however, was not disinterested in the moral welfare of his nation and it was partially thanks to his works that child characters in fiction underwent dramatic transformation in the mid-nineteenth century. Charles Dickens's characterization of children in his novels (many of which, because they were originally printed as serial chapters in a weekly periodical, were read by both children and adults and thus can be consigned to the category of family readership) exerted considerable influence on the way children were perceived within Western culture. And, in spite of their common readership, Dickens's novels helped to further divide childhood from adulthood by highlighting the innocence and lack of agency of children in mid-nineteenth century Britain. His portrayal of children in *Oliver Twist* (1838)[95], *The Old Curiosity Shop*

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Oliver Twist was the first child-hero in the English novel, which appeared in 1837, the year Victoria became Queen.

(1841), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Great Expectations* (1861), and *Bleak House* (1853), for example, established a conception of children as "rightfully innocent" victims of society's injustices and separated their identity from that of the corrupted and corrupting adult.[96] In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, frail Little Nell epitomizes the Romantic vision of childhood innocence and connection to a higher morality. We see her as the repository of virtue in the story, and she contrasts sharply with the various adult characters that she touches and influences, such as her wastrel grandfather. She is the moralizing force of the novel, reflecting a theme that Jackie Wullschläger explains would become a favorite to the Victorians: "childhood as morally redemptive, with adult men cared for and spiritually rehabilitated by children."[97] When the scene depicting Little Nell's death was published, on both sides of the Atlantic readers of the serial drama were "devastated and bound together by grief."[98] Dickens's narrator in *Bleak House* expresses similar devastation and outrage at the death of the child character, Jo, who is a street urchin caught in the web of corruption and apathy of the Chancery Courts. When Jo dies in the slums, the narrator declares:

> Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right
> Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and
> women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And
> dying thus around us, every day.[99]

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[96] Knuth, *Children's Literature and British Identity,* 31.

[97] Jackie Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland: The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J. M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and A. A. Milne* (London: Methuen, 1995), 20.

[98] Knuth, *Children's Literature and British Identity,* 33.

[99] Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House,* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 734.

With this apostrophe, which includes not only the greater population within the story but also the readers of the story in its address, Dickens places the blame for Jo's death directly on society's shoulders without mitigating its burden. Each repetition of the word "dead" is a blow to the government, to the church, and to the entire adult population who were once also innocents born, like Jo and Wordsworth's child, "with Heavenly compassion in [their] hearts." Children like Jo, Dickens intimates, continue to die because the adults responsible for constructing and managing their world fail them. In this way, Dickens does not allow his readerly audience to dismiss this particular instance of child mortality as an unfortunate but irremediable loss. Rather, he aims for social reform. Thus, by drawing greater attention to the vulnerability of childhood in contrast to the agency of adulthood through his portrayal of his unfortunate child heroes, Dickens instigated a change in the way children were treated by society and the state. Rebecca Knuth claims Dickens "never left his readers in doubt about the moral of a story" and that "Dickens's compelling child characters were created out of an earnest desire to counter the emotional apathy that plagued Victorian England."[100]

Other writers followed suit, using their works to help protect what was fast becoming the most precious stage of life. For example, Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863), like Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, employed the fictional life of a child chimney sweep to target the adult conscience. Knuth explains how this strange book shockingly and graphically exposed the cruelty and exploitation of employing children as chimney sweeps. It called attention to the reality of the child's situation, forced up the dirty, narrow flues without proper attire or safety measures. Sometimes the child fell and was injured; other times the child incurred horrible burns or even suffered asphyxiation because it was commonplace for

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[100] Knuth, *Children's Literature and British Identity,* 33.

homeowners to build a fire beneath the children as they cleaned. [101] Kingsley's story so

shocked and horrified the public that there was a general outcry and within a year of the

story's publication, the Chimney Sweepers Regulation Act was enacted, prohibiting children

from being forced to work as sweeps.[102] The Chimney Sweeper's Regulation Act was one

of a number of child labor laws that came into being in the latter part of the nineteenth

century, such as the British Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act of 1889. Indeed, before

these regulations restricting, for example, the number of hours a child could work or what

jobs s/he was incapable of performing, most children were in fact part of the industrial labor

force, while the "lucky" ones worked in agriculture. With the passing of child labor laws

and the enactment of educational reform, children and childhood were now recognized by

the state to be different from adults and adulthood, and therefore it was necessary to treat

children differently—not as 'free agents,' but as dependents.[103] In keeping with Romantic

notions about the child, and with the concern for the protection, development, and

celebration of the individual child, came, as Cunningham puts it, "the triumph of the view

that childhood was not only a separate stage in life, but the best of those stages."[104] But

what, then, did this new view mean for the growing body of children's literature? As the

nineteenth century wore on, the desire to put forward the idea of the child as "an isolated

emblem of innocence"[105] and to celebrate "youth for youthful pleasure's sake" led more and

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[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500,* 143.

[104] Ibid.*,* 58.

[105] Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

more frequently to adult themes and concerns being purged from children's literature.[106]

Thus, as the number of stories that were written exclusively for child readers increased, it

has been suggested by a host of critics that the distance between a book for a child and a

novel for an adult grew apart in terms of the characters, themes, motifs, and symbols as well

as literacy level that characterized each literature. This period, which generally refers to the

span of time between the late 1850s/early 1860s until the mid-to-late 1920s, was given a

name: The Golden Age of Children's Literature.

The Golden Age and the Cult of the Child: New Fictions for the Imagination

The year 1865, in which Charles Dodgson published *Alice's Adventures in*

Wonderland under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll instigated yet another radical

transformation in the arena of children's literature. Carroll's novel was written with the

express purpose of pleasing children—three specific children, actually: Lorina, Edith, and,

of course, Alice Liddell, who asked Charles Dodgson to tell them a story to pass an

afternoon while boating on the Thames. He obliged, eventually writing down the story for

Alice and giving it to her as a present. Thus the resulting novel concerned itself with the

desire to please her and keep her attention, instead of being motivated by an adult's didactic

or moralistic agendas of child-rearing or education. The book was an unprecedented success

and, taking their cue from Carroll, authors of children's literature began to abandon the

edifying and the instructive in order to revel in the nonsensical and the fantastic.[107]

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[106] Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland: The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J. M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and A. A. Milne,* 28.

[107] Edward Lear's *Nonsense Songs and Stories* (1871) is an excellent example of this new kind of literature.

Following closely upon Carroll's heels was J. M. Barrie, who, when writing what is now known as *Peter Pan* at the turn of the 20th century, in the words of Maria Tatar, "looked to the mind of the child rather than the agendas of adults for inspiration."[108] These two books about two child-characters, Alice and Peter, who reject the world of adulthood in preference for worlds of wonder and of infinite possibility, became the ideal models to which subsequent children's writers aspired.

So began the professed "Golden Age" of children's literature, to which belonged the novels of Frances Hodgson Burnett, Edith Nesbit, Kenneth Grahame, George Macdonald, and A. A. Milne. There was an empathetic rather than directive narrative relationship with the child protagonists of these works; the moralistic attitudes and condescending didacticism that characterized the tone of previous fiction for children were jettisoned in favor of narrators who conspired or sympathized primarily with the child rather than with the adult.[109] As we have witnessed, the prevailing notion of childhood during the Victorian and Edwardian periods was that it was a separate, sacred, and ephemeral stage of life that needed to be celebrated, protected, and cherished. Coupled with the broader sense of nostalgia for the sacrosanct nature of this earliest phase of existence was a desire to shield the child from adult responsibilities and, especially, adult knowledge and experiences, what Marah Gubar describes as being thought of as those "painful complexities of modern life."[110]

The ideological manifestation of childhood as the epitome of innocence and inexperience at the turn of the 19th century achieved an almost mythical status. It inspired

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[108] Maria Tatar, Harvard University, "Fairy Tales and Fantasy Literature," Syllabus, 2012.

[109] Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14.

[110] Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, 4.

what would come to be called "the cult of the child" and would dominate notions about children, childhood, and fiction for children until the 1920s. Scholars like Felicity Hughes and Beverly Lyon Clark, perhaps correctly, place much of the blame for this narrow view of young people on the shoulders of Henry James. And, indeed, perhaps no other single writer has made a greater impact on the separation of literature for children and literature for adults. As I have described in the previous chapter, by dissociating the novel from its family readership and redirecting it toward the *cognoscenti*, "art's traditional elite audience of educated adult males, outside the home, at court, the coffee house, or the club," James hoped that the 'serious novel' would earn its status as high art by dealing with the facts of life from which women and children had to be protected.[111] James therefore promoted the belief that in order to be serious, novels must also be exclusive. And, according to James, in order to be so, the novel must increase in complexity and require the maturity and discrimination that was "beyond the reach of all but the highly educated."[112]

However, it seems that this dissociation between children's literature and adult literature was actually inevitable. Even before James wrote his essays, because of the Romantic notion of the child and the new laws that protected children's physical, mental, and emotional health, adults were already reluctant to include children in the discussion of topics that were previously taboo not just for women and the young, but for *every* reader of fiction. Sexuality was especially unmentionable. James correctly regarded sexual knowledge as the crucial barrier between children and adults during the late nineteenth century and, as Anne Scott MacLeod claims, "if literature for children remained behind the

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[111] Hughes, *Children's Literature: Theory and Practice*, 544.

[112] Ibid.

barrier, it was because adult society wanted it that way."[113] And, indeed, this ideology of

innocence was made manifest in some of the most fundamental texts of the Golden Age.

For example, Jackie Wullschläger claims that "the idea that innocent girlhood was a model

for pure womanhood was a belief held passionately by Lewis Carroll."[114] The poems

framing *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

reveal Carroll's philosophy of childhood. He calls the first story "childish" and the second a

"fairy-tale" that "the child of the pure unclouded brow" must keep with her for the rest of

her life to remember the "happy summer days" of her youth when she is "a melancholy

maiden." He believes ardently that "childhood's nest of gladness" will protect the grown

woman from the "raving blast" of the winter of her adulthood. Indeed, when Alice returns

from her Wonderland dream, her grown sister has a dream of her own:

> Lastly she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers
> would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she
> would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart
> of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little
> children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange
> tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago; and
> how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find pleasure
> in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the
> happy summer days.[115]

Carroll's ideal of childhood was in keeping with the Romantic notion of the child,

but his stories about Alice also heightened the fascination with the child as a site of lost joy,

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[113] Anne Scott MacLeod, "Making Change," *Children's Literature*, Vol. 33, Hollins University (2005), 254.

[114] Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland,* 20.

[115] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 127.

"unclouded" by experience, a sentiment which had a profound effect on subsequent Golden

Age writers such as J. M. Barrie and Kenneth Grahame. Wullschläger claims that: "The

tone of such an emphasis on childhood prepared the way for the view, which gained ground

in late Victorian England, that only youth mattered."[116]

The Golden Age: Artless Innocents or Artful Dodgers?

Perhaps only youth mattered, but the idea that children's writers and members of the

"cult of the child" believed incontrovertibly in childhood's innocence and artlessness is,

conceivably, not an entirely accurate representation. New interpretations of these texts for

young people by scholars such as Marah Gubar and Perry Nodelman reveal a deep

ambivalence on behalf of Golden Age authors to this ideology of innocence, an ambivalence

that subtly manifested itself in their works for children. Rather than promoting this

disabling form of primitivism, Gubar writes:

> In their own time, in other words, famous Golden Age fantasy
> authors were often faulted for *failing* to endorse the new ideology
> of innocence, which aimed to erect a firm barrier between adult
> and child. Rather than promoting the idea that young people are
> primitive naïfs, these authors more often characterize the child
> inside and outside the book as a literate, educated subject who is
> fully conversant with the values, conventions, and cultural artifacts
> of the civilized world.[117]

Contrary to the theories of Henry James, the child, to these writers, was a complex being: a

person who was self-conscious, literate, and a participant in society. From Alice's

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[116] Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland,* 27.

[117] Gubar, *Artful Dodgers,* 6.

determination to remember her lessons to Sara Crewe's knowledge of Indian culture, from Wendy Darling's obsession with keeping a proper house to Mole's wistful longing for the hominess of his country abode, and from Oswald Bastable's condescending superiority to his sisters to Owl's pompous proffering of advice and unhelpful anecdotes to Winnie the Pooh, it is clear that the child (or childlike) characters of Victorian and Edwardian literature were thoroughly steeped in their cultures, though they were excluded from the high culture of adult society and its literature. Even, writes Gubar, in texts where children were separated from their parents, they were not "untouched Others, magically free from adult influence," but rather "socially saturated beings, profoundly shaped by the culture, manners, and morals of their time."[118] Gubar and Perry Nodelman also claim that the feeling of anxiety that permeates the texts of Victorian and Edwardian authors when they describe children and their relationships to the adults in their worlds also attests to the notion that they believed the child was not wholly inexperienced or ingenuous.

If what Gubar and Nodelman argue is true, it would mean that the Golden Age of children's literature actually brought fictions for children and fictions for adults closer than they had ever been since the theories of John Locke and Rousseau were introduced. And, indeed, in the next few pages I would like to demonstrate the way Golden Age fictions for children attempted to bridge the gap between the adult and the child (and their respective literatures) by examining perhaps the two most famous and representative texts of this period: *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*.

The Golden Age: Alice's Adventures Above and Below

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[118] Ibid., 4-5

Though as I mentioned earlier in this chapter *Alice in Wonderland* does indeed reinforce the idea of childhood as a separate stage of existence to be cherished and celebrated, the novel itself seems to refuse any kind of categorization. Rather, it seems to be of a hybrid form: partly child and partly adult in its tone and concerns—a hybridity which is reflected in the novel's protagonist. Carroll's Alice seems to be, at least for her creator, not simply an innocent and impressionable child, but also a pre-adolescent female intellectual whose experiences expose the fragility of her identity. Alice is both naïve and perceptive, artless and artful, sometimes content and sometimes curious, sometimes rational and sometimes nonsensical and in this way Carroll presents the child as a multi-layered concept with a complex inner life. His Alice is not a stagnant object; Carroll writes about her in different (and often extreme) stages of physical, emotional, and psychological existence, emphasizing her multifaceted nature and her own unique powers and intelligence that belong to her precisely because she exists in childhood, in this stage between the extremes of infancy and adulthood. Throughout her bizarre journey through Wonderland, Carroll shows us his heroine's earnest attempts to understand and find meaning in her situation, trying to "make sense" of what she discovers about herself and her relationship to time, space, reality, mortality, and identity. For example, Alice asks herself a great many questions and makes numerous conjectures as she is falling and when she begins to wander about her new surroundings. She becomes, and rightly so, increasingly anxious as her adventure begins in good earnest and her body begins to metamorphose in the most sudden and alarming ways when she eats and drinks.   Her fears that she will never be able to get into the garden because of her height are soon replaced by her fear that she is growing too small for there to be enough left of her "to make *one* respectable person!" and finally that

she will disappear altogether, snuffed out like a candle.[119] But rather than portraying Alice

as a passive character at the mercy of circumstance, simply fearful and not thoughtful about

what is happening to her, Carroll shows us the inner-workings of Alice's mind. For

example, when Alice, in order to determine who she is (whether she is, in fact, herself, or

has transformed into somebody else such as the apparently dim-witted child Mabel), tries to

recite Isaac's Watt's "Against Idleness and Mischief" which was published in 1715 as one

of his *Divine Songs for Children*, she finds that she has somehow chosen the wrong words

and transformed the poem into something else entirely.[120] The original poem is:

> How doth the little busy bee
> Improve each shining hour,
> And gather honey all the day
> From every opening flower!
>
> How skillfully she builds her cell!
> How neat she spreads the wax!
> And labors hard to store it well
> With the sweet food she makes.
>
> In works of labor or of skill,
> I would be busy too;
> For Satan finds some mischief still
> For idle hands to do.
>
> In books, or work, or healthful play,
> Let my first years be passed,
> That I may give for every day
> Some good account at last.[121]

But Alice recites:

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[119] Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, 12.

[120] Ibid., 16.

[121] Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, 23.

> How doth the little crocodile
> Improve his shining tail,
> And pour the waters of the Nile
> On every golden scale!
>
> How cheerfully he seems to grin,
> How neatly spreads his claws,
> And welcomes little fishes in,
> With gently smiling jaws![122]

What makes Alice's mistake interesting is that her poem reveals the anxieties she has lately experienced, namely, that she has made a terrible mistake in following the White Rabbit and that her imprudence may lead to her demise. She has been idle, dozing in the afternoon sun instead of reading her book like a good little girl, and from that idleness has come mischief. However, Alice's version of the poem also reveals her resourcefulness and her ability to adapt what she has learned to fit her situation. This new poem thus reflects her inner state in a more accurate way than Watts's moralizing ever could; she is not the staid and boring Mabel any more than the crocodile in her poem is like Isaac Watt's busy bee.

Therefore, in Wonderland Alice is permitted to explore her emotions, her fears, and her identity in such a way that would never be permitted in her aboveground Victorian cosmos. Though even underground characters and forces are working against the child, endeavoring to thwart her growth and confound her understanding of her relationship to the world, Alice is the dreamer of her own dream and can thus influence her own experience in a way that liberates her from the limitations of her age. By creating a space in which the child can address the emotions and questions that are forbidden to her above ground, Carroll allows his heroine to surreptitiously, even unconsciously, undermine the oppressive agents

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[122] Ibid.

that try to belittle and suppress her subjectivity, both below ground and above. In this way, by witnessing Alice's responses and reflections upon her adventures and being privy to her thoughts, Carroll gives the Victorian child reader license to find meaning in her own experience and create sense out of nonsense—the most adult of freedoms.

The Golden Age: The Continuing Case of Peter Pan

Perhaps no text has ever celebrated childhood the way it is celebrated in J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. It is undeniable that the child in this text embodies the Romantic ideal; Peter is most assuredly an "isolated emblem of innocence" and revels in "youth for youthful pleasures sake." Yet there is an underlying unease that surrounds Peter's story precisely because of his being gay and innocent and heartless—innocence does not necessarily denote goodness. In order to examine the way Barrie reveals his discomfort with the idea of childhood innocence, it is perhaps helpful to look at the story that inspired the Peter Pan myth as well as the novel for children that appeared later. By comparing the two texts, we will be able to identify moments of slippage in *Peter and Wendy* where Barrie subtly intimates his concerns about the truth of childhood.

The character of Peter Pan infamously appeared in Barrie's earlier novel, *The Little White Bird*[123], in which the narrator, Captain W___, employs the story of Peter Pan and his exploits in Kensington Gardens to gain the affection and trust of a little boy named David. The anxieties the narrator unwittingly reveals about the origins, sexuality, and death of children in this novel have a sinister as well as a pathetic quality to them as Captain W___ seems desperate to attain a feeling of closeness with David, whether it is by supplanting the

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[123] *The Little White Bird* was published in 1902.

child's own parents or by other means.[124] The narrator's obsession with the way children

come into being, and the way he creates an entirely fictitious, alternative creation story

about David exposes his uneasiness about both his own origins and sexuality as well as the

origins and sexuality of the child.[125] Indeed, throughout the novel, the narrator is

vehemently opposed to any explicit references to the child's sexuality, though to the

discomfort of the reader he continues to make frequent allusions to the child's body and

physicality. When the narrator is first left alone with the child, for example, he avoids what

he calls "the public disrobing of David," or describing David's naked body when he bathes

the child before putting him to bed.[126] However, this self-conscious turn of phrase cannot

help but intimate that the undressing of the child is a sort of strip tease. As with the entirety

of the novel, the assertion of innocence operates to produce an uncanny return of the

repressed fascination with experience, or sexual knowledge. Furthermore, when David

spends the night in his bed, the narrator is unable to refrain from describing the child's body

and physicality:

> "Why, David," said I, sitting up, "do you want to come into my
> bed?"
> "Mother said I wasn't to want it unless you wanted it first," he
> squeaked.
> "It is what I have been wanting all the time," said I, and then
> without more ado the little white figure rose and flung itself at me.
> For the rest of the night he lay on me and across me, and

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[124] The narrator's fascination with David is sometimes viewed as thinly veiled pedophilia.

[125] The narrator denies any notion of human intimacy in association with David's birth by creating
the myth about the little white bird, who is the David before the child. In addition, he constantly
reminds the child and the reader that he does not want to have contact with David's mother, and asks
David to call him "Father," completely dismissing the child's true paternal figure, who has gone
away to sea. In this way, the bachelor narrator creates a simulated family unit that lacks the physical
relationship between father and mother.

[126] J. M. Barrie, *The Little White Bird* (Lexington, KY: Renaissance Classics, 2012), XIX.

> sometimes his feet were at the bottom of the bed and sometimes on the pillow, but he always retained possession of my finger, and occasionally he woke me to say that he was sleeping with me. I had not a good night. I lay thinking."[127]

The agitation of the narrator in this passage is almost palpable. He is both thrilled by his contact with the child and yet troubled by it. Perhaps, we could argue, the root of the narrator's discomfort is his awareness that his fascination with the child and his ideals about himself—such as his own modesty and his own innocence—are in conflict. Jacqueline Rose maintains that the narrator's struggle to come to terms with his relationship to David makes this novel "one of the most explicit accounts to date of what it might mean to write fiction for the child. *The Little White Bird* is the story of the difficulty of that process—the difficulty of the relation between adult and child…"[128]

Finally, death, especially infant and child mortality, is referred to with pointed indifference in this novel. For example, in Kensington Gardens, Peter Pan speaks very unconcernedly to a child named Maimie about the death and disappearance of children, and tells a horrified Maimie how easily the parents supplant the lost children with new ones. However, it is Maimie who looks foolish in the tale because she is not willing to renounce her mother or, it is implied, her life, to stay forever with Peter. The narrator speaks of her choice with a pitying tone and eventually Maimie seems to regret her decision as she eagerly and enviously continues to watch and visit Peter. However, despite this rather nonchalant and even oddly desirous attitude toward childhood death, throughout the entire text the

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 5.

narrator continuously focuses on the crucial fact of Peter Pan's identity: he will never grow

up and thus his childhood will never "die."

In *The Little White Bird*, subjects that would be considered taboo in children's

literature (the fear of origins, the narrator's obsession with the child's polymorphous

sexuality, the indifference toward child mortality) do not only slip into the text, but are at the

very heart of this novel for adults. By centering his story on these themes, it could be

argued that Barrie erects a barrier between this work and the subsequent variations of the

Peter Pan story created for a younger audience. Thus, in *The Case of Peter Pan* Jacqueline

Rose contends that in the text of *Peter and Wendy* these anxieties must essentially be

stripped from the stories, or, at the very least, be hidden away under the guise of an

adventure tale in order for it to become a work for children. And indeed, Barrie's subsequent

Peter Pan stories, plays, and novels for children grew exponentially apart from his original

novel for adults in terms of the themes, motifs, symbols, and even characters and literacy

level. Rose calls the resulting Peter Pan story "an unmistakable act of censorship" and

claims that the "rest of *Peter Pan*'s history can then be read as one long attempt to wipe out

the residual signs of the disturbance out of which it was produced."[129] Rose argues that

because of this continuous attempt, any simple notion of children's fiction is impossible and

thus makes the case that the entire genre depends on the adult's "colonization" of childhood

as well as the complete and ongoing sexual and political mystification of the child.[130] The

assertion of innocence operates to produce an uncanny return of what has been repressed.

To assume that children's books are simply written "for" children, says Rose, and to pretend

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[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid., 11.

that their language is an innocent, "unmediated reflection of the real world" rather than an influential and shaping force is problematic and, quite frankly, disturbing.[131]

Yet Marah Gubar claims that this is not, in fact, the case of Peter Pan nor the case of children's literature during the Victorian or Edwardian periods. Though she recognizes and praises Rose's invigorating work as a significant addition to the field of children's literature criticism, she challenges Rose about the content of children's fiction. All these "forms of difficulty and confusion" that authors have sought to excise from children's literature do in fact still subtly reveal themselves to readers, be they children or adults.[132] Gubar also disagrees with Rose's contention about the widespread tendency to define childhood by its "primitive purity," both because she argues that this idea was not as pervasive and all-consuming as Rose implies and because she believes that the authors of works for children were extremely cognizant of the complicated relationship they had with their child readers, so much so that it emerged as "a key theme in children's fiction, particularly during the Golden Age."[133] Additionally, she believes that Rose does not give enough credit to child readers to be able to successfully detect, digest, and contend with the ideas, beliefs, political views, and behavioral norms propagated in their literature by adults. She writes:

> That is to say, by implying that child readers invariably succumb to adult efforts to regulate and exploit them, such discourse itself "others" children by characterizing them as innocent naïfs whose literacy skills are too primitive to enable them to cope with the aggressive textual overtures of adults.[134]

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[131] Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 30.

[132] Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan,* 6.

[133] Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 30.

[134] Ibid., 31

For Gubar, children in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, be they real or fictional, were actually "artful dodgers," capable of both defending against and manipulating the bodies of information they received from adults as well as contributing to the creation of a narrative and their own lives.[135] Indeed, by briefly examining the text of *Peter and Wendy*, we will see that even though Barrie may have ostensibly allied himself to the ideal of innocent simplicity and invested in the child's otherness, his novel also attests to his fascination with precocious competence and disturbs the notion of a strict divide between adult and child.[136]

Before beginning an investigation into J. M. Barrie's works, it is also important to note that by the turn of the twentieth century, though psychoanalysis and Freudian theory were in their early stages, it is likely that Barrie would have heard of Freud as his work had reached England by the time the play version of Peter Pan was composed.[137] Indeed, though it is impossible to know whether or not Barrie had read Freud or if he took inspiration from his theories, Kenneth Kidd tells us that many of Freud's "great themes, among them difficulties of language, the problem(s) of sexuality and origin, and the persistence of childhood," whether by accident or design, can be seen in Barrie's work.[138] Both Freud and Barrie, Kidd claims, impacted how childhood and the child were portrayed by children's literature writers throughout most of the twentieth century in the way that they explored in

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[135] Ibid., 38

[136] J. M. Barrie, *The Annotated Peter Pan*, ed. Maria Tatar (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), xliii.

[137] Kenneth B. Kidd, *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 84.

[138] Ibid., 83.

detail the fantasy of escape from civilization, adulthood, fantasy, and polite society, one

working in a scientific[139] the other in an imaginative register.[140]

It took nine years for the story of Peter Pan to be published in novel form. Though

Barrie extracted what would become his iconic character from *The Little White Bird* in 1904

in order to make him the lead role in the play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow

Up*[141], it took another five years before Barrie finally acquiesced to requests for an official

story. The text of *Peter and Wendy* varies considerably from both *The Little White Bird* as

well as *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, though it retains the same basic plot

as the play: The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up, Peter Pan, in recovering his shadow, meets

the Darling children and whisks them off to Neverland, returning them safely home only

after his defeat of Captain Hook and as a result of Wendy's desire to return to her family.

However, while the play is, for the most part, straightforward in its celebration of childhood,

glorying in its freedom and fun, the novel is more complex and reveals an ambivalent

attitude toward the notion of childhood's superiority and innocence on behalf of the narrator,

Wendy, and even Peter Pan himself.

Indeed, it is through the narrator that we witness the most boundary crossing

between adult and child because the narrator (to Jacqueline Rose's chagrin) refuses to

identify himself clearly as one or the other. Maria Tatar writes that "Barrie's narrator uses

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[139] Also of note are the theories of Carl Jung, Freud's colleague, who believed that that infants are born with a sense of wholeness that is lost with social development. Jung's theories about the child and his system of archetypes have continued to influence many writers of juvenile fantasy even today.

[140] Ibid., 83-84

[141] The play existed only in performance for many years and underwent numerous revisions, deletions, and additions before it was published in 1928.

sophisticated adult diction, but he is also playful, capricious, and partisan in ways that third-person narrators rarely are."[142] The narrator, for instance, makes asides to his audience that further confuse his allegiance. For example, in his narration he says to the reader, "Let us now kill a pirate, to show Hook's method," and when choosing which adventure to describe, he "tosses" for it, like a child determining a game.[143] However, he also peppers his descriptions with Latin and French words (Tinker Bell is "slightly inclined to *embonpoint*"[144]; the stars yell out "Cave, Peter!" in order to warn Peter that the grown-ups are coming[145]; when introducing Captain Hook, the narrator declares "I have been told he was a *raconteur* of repute"[146]) and explains things to his reader by referring to mythology and socio-historical references (Tiger Lily is "the most beautiful of dusky Dianas"[147]; "something of the grand seigneur still clung" to Hook; and, in Hook's dress, "he somewhat aped the attire associated with the name of Charles II, having heard it said in some earlier period of his career that he bore a strange resemblance to the ill-fated Stuarts"[148]). But it is perhaps in Barrie's descriptions of Peter and Wendy that we best see the narrator's ability to cross the boundary between literature for children and literature for adults.

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[142] Tatar, *The Annotated Peter Pan,* xlviii.

[143] Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*, 68.

[144] Ibid., 36.

[145] Ibid., 52.

[146] Ibid., 68.

[147] Ibid., 69.

[148] Ibid., 68.

Although the intentions of the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* differ from those of the narrator of *The Little White Bird,* his thoughts are nonetheless consumed by the same things: a fear of origins, a fascination with the child's sexuality, and an awareness of the threat of mortality. For example, when describing how Mr. and Mrs. Darling came to be married and have children, the narrator foreshadows the chaste relationship of Peter and Wendy as sex is decidedly excluded from the equation: Mr. Darling wins the hand of Mrs. Darling by catching a cab and beating her other suitors (who were on foot) to her home.[149] Though they have affection for one another, the feelings they share are those of fondness, not passion, as evidenced by Mr. Darling's failed attempt to capture the kiss at the corner of Mrs. Darling's mouth. It eludes him for the whole text and is captured only by Peter, which also intimates that the kiss is a chaste one.

Peter Pan is also unconditionally averse to sexuality and, indeed, endeavors to avoid any form of contact that is not fighting. However, the physical appeal of the child Peter, like the appeal of David, is always at the heart of the story. He is scantily clad in skeleton leaves and the narrator describes his first-teeth as his "pearls," which are "the most charming thing" about him. Even Captain Hook is captivated by Peter's physicality: when he comes upon Peter sleeping, though his intention was to kill him, Hook is arrested by the beauty of the sleeping child and almost stays his hand. It is only Peter's cocky look that recalls Hook to his purpose—he can't stand to see Peter there, looking so smug. Nevertheless, Hook's rage

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[149] Additionally, Wendy and her siblings are not described as being conceived in the conventional way, but rather they are conceived as art: original drawings made by Mrs. Darling (her "guesses"), which are then measured against the family income in order to determine whether the children are to be kept. Mr. and Mrs. Darling's relationship resembles the relationship of two children trying (and failing) to play house. Neither is good at expenses or knows a thing about child-rearing (as evidenced by the fact that they have a Newfoundland dog as a nanny), and Mr. Darling flies into fits of temper and bad behavior that resemble the tantrums of a very young child.

at Peter's cockiness is suggestive of the power of the child's physicality to inspire passion in an adult—whether it is love or hatred.

In addition, though the narrator tells us that Peter unquestionably wants a *child* mother—that is to say, a female completely devoid of the sexuality of an adult woman—this kind of female seems hard to come by in Neverland. Before they even leave Number 14 Wendy has given Peter a kiss and has been rewarded by having her hair pulled by her jealous rival, Tinker Bell. When Peter decides to bring Wendy to Neverland, desire for her as a physical companion is entirely out of the question. He whisks Wendy off to Neverland because he wants her to tell him stories, winning her over when he says that he and the Lost Boys would respect her tremendously.[150] During Wendy's stay on the island of Neverland, we witness Peter constantly skirt Wendy's questions about his feelings for her and her not-so-subtle desire for their pretend relationship to become a reality.[151] But Peter never fails to remind Wendy that "it's only make-believe," and, much to her chagrin, he makes a mockery of his role as "father" to the Lost Boys.[152] What is more, every female on the island is taken with Peter and desires to be his only object of affection. When Peter is not avoiding Wendy, he is avoiding Tiger Lily, who, though she is distanced as a foreigner, is still seen as a threat by Wendy. And, to further complicate matters, Peter is constantly misunderstanding the jealousy of Tinker Bell, who, again, is untouchable as a fairy (even more so as a mere light

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[150] In addition, like Mr. Darling, Peter deliberates over the acceptance of two of their make-believe children, John and Michael, who, as far as he is concerned, are simply by-products of Wendy's kidnapping

[151] It is not that Wendy desires a sexual relationship per se, but she does desire to be more than just a platonic companion to Peter.

[152] He has no problem abusing his authority in order to boss them all around, but refuses to give up adventuring for fathering.

in the theatrical production), but who nevertheless is possessive of Peter and furious about his relationship with Wendy. Thus, Peter's physicality and the attraction of the females that result from it reveal an underlying concern about the child's sexuality.

As the title *Peter and Wendy* indicates, Peter is not the only child in the story. However, his eternal childhood existence is not possible for the other children in the tale nor for the child reader. Every other child must follow the way of Wendy, that is, the way of growth and maturity. In his description of Wendy, the narrator does not persist in the myth of an innocent childhood, and through her character's perspective the text crosses a boundary into the concerns of adults. Wendy, though still in the nursery (in other words, still a child), is recognized as a threat to the notion of childhood by the narrator with these words: "Now Wendy was every inch a woman, though there were not very many inches…"[153] Though she is not an adult, she is already in the process of maturation and therefore, for the narrator, she has lost her affinity with the childhood state.   Wendy knows she must eventually grow up and for her, "two [was] the beginning of the end."[154] From the very beginning of the book, Wendy demonstrates that she is not content with merely pretending to be Peter's wife. Wendy, unlike the innocent Peter, is at least somewhat aware of her sexuality; she knows the physical nature of a kiss and will therefore, in time, come to understand the physical aspect of a marital relationship. But once revealed, Wendy's knowledge is then criticized throughout the rest of story by the narrator, as if she must be rebuked for the discomfort she reveals. For example, the narrator, when discussing the kiss Wendy desires from Peter says: "She made herself rather cheap by inclining her face toward

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[153] Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*, 25.

[154] Ibid., 1.

him."[155] Wendy, the narrator seems determined to demonstrate, not only makes Peter and

Tinker Bell uncomfortable, but she is also unsettling to the audience, and her knowledge

finally even disturbs herself. Wendy, though eager to join Peter on his island, cannot seem

to enjoy Neverland like the other children; she always concerns herself with domestic

matters and the welfare of her "children," and she becomes frightened that she may be

forgotten by her parents in reality. In addition, with an almost satisfied tone, the narrator

tells us that it is only when it is too late that Wendy realizes with a pang that she cannot

return to her youth. Maturity in this text is considered shameful; when Peter visits her for

the last time, she does not want to admit to him or to herself that she has matured

irrevocably. She tries to hide her adulthood, saying, "Woman, woman, let go of me."[156] It

is as if the narrator wishes to prove to the reader that only decidedly "innocent" children are

welcome in the fantasy of childhood; those who demonstrate otherwise are forever excluded

from this happy state.

This Peter Pan, like the Peter Pan that appears in *The Little White Bird*, is also

supposedly unafraid of, and seemingly impervious to, death. Indeed, he regards death as the

next "awfully big adventure." By making Peter Pan unafraid, the narrator again assuages

the reader's fears about mortality. However, it is interesting to note that Peter Pan is always

teetering on the edge of death and, what is more, it seems he enjoys death's close proximity.

During the episode when he and Wendy are swimming and Captain Hook is drawing ever

nearer, Wendy wishes to swim away but Peter, Barrie writes, "would not budge. He was

tingling with life and also topheavy with conceit. 'Am I not a wonder, oh I am a

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[155] Ibid., 25.

[156] Ibid., 166.

wonder!..."[157] Pirates, crocodiles, sudden tides, poisonings, and mortal battles seem always to be the order of the day and a Lost Boy, a 'Redskin,' and/or a pirate die almost routinely, as a matter of course. Peter remains, as ever, unfazed, and does not mourn his losses.

However, though the narrator and Peter seem unconcerned about the threat of actual death, it is the threat of adulthood or, in other words, the death of childhood, which is subtly revealed to be the deepest fear in this text. Even the narrator's refusal to acknowledge the impossibility of Peter's physicality betrays this anxiety: Peter, the narrator tells us, grew to the age of one week and then refused to go on. However, the child in the story is not only weaned, but he walks, talks, and always manages to make himself the eldest of the Lost Boys in order to maintain his position as leader. He may retain all of his first teeth, but if what the narrator first told us is true, it is, of course, impossible for him to have any teeth at all. Though the narrator's ironic tone reveals that he recognizes the impossibility of Peter's age, he nevertheless continues to determinedly ignore the factors that testify against it.[158]

But endless childhood is perhaps not the blissful existence it is superficially presented to be on the surface of *Peter and Wendy*. Beneath the surface of the adventure tale, the narrator subtly discloses to the reader that Peter's unwillingness to grow up is both the joy and the tragedy of his existence. In a key moment of the text, the narrator quietly shows the price of Peter's remaining a child. When Wendy and the Lost Boys are talking of the goodness of their mothers, Peter interjects with his own sobering story:

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[157] Ibid., 82.

[158] It can be assumed that the narrator realizes that any acknowledgment on his part about the fact that Peter must have grown up at least a little bit would undermine the security of Peter's situation: if Peter or the narrator were to admit to Peter's growing, his childhood would no longer be endless.

"Long ago," he said, "I thought like you that my mother would always keep the window open for me; so I stayed away for moons and moons and moons, and then flew back; but the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed."[159]

Here the narrator reveals to us a the despair of a little boy who was not loved enough to be remembered, which is perhaps why this is the only episode in Peter's life that he is able to recall; the pain of it pushes through his barrier of self-protective forgetfulness and he dreams about it and "the riddle of his existence"—and the dreams are described as nightmares. The fear of being abandoned, the pain of being replaced, and the loneliness of being the only one of his kind demonstrate the powerlessness of the child's position. In this way, the notion of childhood's superiority is undermined by the very child who represents it.

Thus, it is evident that in the novel version of *Peter and Wendy* the story does not completely lose its preoccupation with themes belonging ostensibly to the realm of the adult. Rather, the novel simultaneously appeals to children and adults, crossing boundaries in order to conspire with both groups in an effort to win their attention and allegiance. Maria Tatar writes, "It was Barrie's genius to encode the story in this double fashion without drawing attention to the effort to reach both child and adult."[160] She explains:

Peter and Wendy is encoded with many adult matters, but children find them easy to ignore in their eagerness to follow the adventures of the Darling children. The adult content creates only minor disturbances in a rousing story about fairy dust, pirates, canine nursemaids, and mermaids. Adult readers, by contrast, are more likely to see the skulls littering the text, the many brushes with

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[159] Ibid., 127.

[160] Tatar, *The Annotated Peter Pan,* liii.

death and the constant reminder that, when children grow up, they are "done for."[161]

With *Peter and Wendy*, Barrie reveals to us that children's literature, like childhood itself, is neither constant nor stable, neither completely innocent nor completely sophisticated. Instead, the child has an implicit relationship to language, sexuality, and death, which, if acknowledged, would undermine the adult's relationship to these sources of disquiet. Thus, though writers and critics of literature for children, and, indeed, his contemporaries in general, may have attempted to pigeonhole Barrie as believer in the unmitigated innocence of childhood, this most celebrated work of children's fiction undermines the security of this arbitrary categorization.

The Golden Age: Closing Statements on the Case

In examining the works of Barrie and Carroll, it is definitely plausible that these two children's writers considered their child protagonists and their child readers to be complex, literate, social, and, if not self-sufficient, at least self-conscious beings. Moreover, it is evident that Lewis Carroll and J. M. Barrie were not alone and that many Victorian and Edwardian authors wrote their fictions for children with this view of childhood in mind. Francis Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, which was published in 1911 (the same year as *Peter and Wendy*), celebrated not only the child's alliance to the natural world, but also children's ability to manipulate language in order to change the world around them.   Mary Lennox and Colin Craven's mastery over the Yorkshire dialect and the poetic language of "Magic" enables them to regain their lost childhoods and reclaim their place in their home.

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[161] Ibid., liii.

In addition, this novel dwells heavily on the themes of death and illness, facilitating both the child protagonists' acceptance of their own mortality as well as the conquering of their fear of it. Additionally, novels like Dinah Mullock Craik's *The Little Lame Prince*, in what Jackie Wullschläger calls its "blending of satiric and romantic fantasy and in its dual impulses toward escape from and acceptance of worldly responsibilities," speaks to the child's ability to participate in his or her own self-fashioning.[162]

However, even if Gubar's assertions about Golden Age writers' deep ambivalence to the ideology of innocence are true, the question then becomes: in the years following the cult of the child and the Golden Age of children's literature, did writers continue to create child protagonists and write for child readers that they believed to be complex, multi-faceted human beings? Or, did children's literature succumb to the pressures of maintaining a belief in childhood innocence, a separation between children and adults, and return to the ideologies first proposed by Locke and Rousseau? I would argue that because the novel was still undergoing the process of extricating itself from a family readership, Golden Age writers could have it both ways; they could portray the child as both innocent and experienced, vulnerable and powerful, artless and artful. But, because the novel itself was still read by a common audience for the better part of the Golden Age (which, again, stretched from around the 1850s until the mid-to-late 1920s), both writers for children and writers for adults were limited by what society deemed appropriate to be put in writing. It is important to remember that "adult literature" at this point in time implied a literature that was appropriate for men *as well as* the delicate sensibilities and limited education of women,

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[162] Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland*, 93.

which, of course, meant that children[163] would also be able to read and comprehend these texts. In this way, the novel for children and the novel for adults were not so very different in form or content. It was only after the turn of the century when Jamesian theories about the novel began to take hold that writers for children were restricted by the notion that literature for children must be inferior to literature for adults, and thus the category became hindered by the idea that experimentation with forms, themes, and style were the sole province of serious literature meant for adult males. Thus, though Golden Age novelists like Carroll and Barrie were, indeed, writing novels ostensibly for a child audience, they, like their counterparts writing fiction for adults, were able to explore the boundaries of the novelistic genre because those boundaries were already in flux. In this way, the Golden Age was a crucial period of growth for children's fiction and decreased the disparity between literature for children and literature for adults.

However, by the end of the Golden Age, Rose assures us that the divide between children's literature and adult literature had again increased:

> It is assumed that children's fiction has grown away from this moment, whereas in fact children's fiction has constantly returned to this moment, repeated it, and reproduced its fundamental conception of the child. Children's literature has never completely severed its links with a philosophy which sets up the child as a pure point of origin in relation to language, sexuality and the state.[164]

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[163] Here, of course, I do not refer to very young children, but to children who have a higher level of literacy.

[164] Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 8.

Gubar, as I have explained, has argued eloquently that Rose is incorrect in assuming that the

Golden Age of children's literature did not grow away from the mid- to late-eighteenth

century conceptualization of childhood when it was dominated by the ideas of Locke and

Rousseau. However, although the Golden Age of children's literature demonstrates a breach

in the barrier between the literate, acculturated, influencing adult and the unsophisticated,

innocent, impressionable child, an examination of the fiction for children that followed in its

wake shows that, unfortunately, this break seems to be just that: a brief interruption in the

status quo of children's fiction for the past two centuries.

Children's Literature After The Golden Age: A Dark Age?

Despite this section heading, the past three quarters of a century have not been a

Dark Age for children's literature. To declare it so would be excessive and unpardonable.

After all, the years that followed the Edwardian period gave us works like *Charlotte's Web*,

A Wrinkle in Time, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Hobbit*, and other innovative and

challenging books for children in which the protagonists as well as the child readers are

treated and addressed with respect for their intellectual capacity and discerning sensitivity.

Yet, unlike the books written during the Golden Age when, as we have seen, many of the

writers, critics, and publishers of children's literature strove continuously to acknowledge

and address the agency of the child protagonist and child reader, representing them as

potential collaborators and "blurring rather than policing the subject positions of child and

adult, reader and writer," the majority of the works that were produced after 1930 in both

Europe and America seemed content to allow the gap to widen between children and adults, in both literature and reality.[165]

There are a number of reasons for this renewed marginalization of children's literature. One reason may be that the child continued to be set up as a site for lost innocence due to two devastating world wars. Seth Lerer writes, "It is a cliché to aver that the First World War ended the childhood of the Edwardian era."[166] But Lerer continues in his assessment of post-World War I literature to demonstrate that this cliché exists for a very real reason:

> What dies with Hook is that adventurist ideal, and certainly for Barrie—who revised the play extensively for publication in 1928—that ideal must have rung even more hollow after the death of an entire generation of young men in the First World War. "To die," says Peter Pan, "would be an awfully great adventure."[167] How can we not hear such words on the lips of men such as Rupert Brooke, who saw the play on opening night in 1904 and, a decade later, would enlist. How can we not hear Peter's fancies turned to ash in the mouths of the soldiers who would die?"[168]

In this way, the side of children's literature that explored the cultural anxieties surrounding the child (the fear of origins, mortality, sexuality, etc.) was found to be too disturbing for populations who existed in a very real state of fear. To include such matters in literature for children was to admit that children could comprehend and contemplate the horrors that were

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[165] Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 7.

[166] Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 263.

[167] Indeed, Peter Pan's exclamation that "to die would be an awfully big adventure" became so inappropriate during the First World War that Peter's famous lines were omitted from the play for a period of time out of respect for the young men who were being sent to the front.

[168] Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 263.

occurring in reality. Therefore, as the window was barred by the alarmed Mrs. Darling to keep Peter Pan out of the nursery, children's literature after the First World War was excised of any threatening notions about the child or childhood.   Consequently, in the period following the First World War, children's literature turned nostalgic.[169] Childhood was again associated with nature and in books like A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1926, 1928), for example, the child (or the anthropomorphic childlike character) was shown as largely carefree and innocent. P. L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* books also demonstrate this nostalgic impulse because, although they were written in the early 1930s, the novels were set in pre-war Edwardian London with a heroine ("The Great Exception") who (familiarly) is the only person who retains the magical and delightful secrets that are possessed by infants.

I would also like to argue, along with Felicity Hughes and Beverly Lyon Clark, that the fundamental reason literature for children continued to be segregated from that of adults was that the very notion of "the literary" for children had changed. In the age of children's literature that succeeded the Golden Age, for every foothold achieved by a text that recognized children as complex beings, fluent in their language and culture, there were numerous other texts that condescended to, victimized, or shielded the child. The views James expressed in "The Future of the Novel" had firmly taken root and had impacted both the development of children's literature and the attitudes toward it. The consequence of this separation of the two literatures also meant that, as adult fiction gained repute in aesthetic theory as well as literary theory and criticism, children's literature found itself outside the

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[169] This sense of nostalgia, though it appeared in both British and American children's literature, was especially prevalent in British novels, perhaps because the war on that side of the Atlantic was longer and more costly.

circle of the critical lens. Through her examination of Professor F. J. Coleman's language in *Contemporary Essays in Aesthetics* (1968), Felicity Hughes demonstrates that the assumption that children cannot have aesthetic satisfactions was common "knowledge" in the period leading up to the 1970s. Coleman's idea was that we could rank pleasures in a sequence, and that our ability to experience those feelings of pleasure was dependent upon our degree of intelligence and discrimination:

> The lowest pleasures would be those that any sentient human being can feel—children, idiots, the senile; they are such pleasures that do not require any power of discrimination. To call a pleasure an 'aesthetic' pleasure is to imply that it would fall on the higher end of the continuum; therefore aesthetic pleasures are those that require discrimination, intelligence, and imagination to be experienced. For surely we do not speak of children or the mentally deficient as *experiencing* art, though of course they may *hear* a symphony or see a painting…"[170]

This is not only offensive to children (and a number of other people), but also, as we now know, completely untrue. However, it serves the purpose of providing us with a clear insight into the prejudiced idea that children cannot have aesthetic satisfactions.

Another manifestation of this idea that children lack the capacity for aesthetic discernment began, again, around the time that Henry James wrote his essay, "The Art of Fiction." Recall that in this essay, James insisted that in order to be taken seriously fiction demanded a sense of reality and its characters were required to be "objective." This meant that the reader of fiction must be "detached, impartial, and skeptical."[171] However, James ran into opposition with his contemporary, Robert Louis Stevenson, a writer and critic who

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[170] Hughes, *Children's Literature: Theory and Practice*, 549.

[171] Ibid., 546.

"admired novels which made intense demands of sympathy and identification" on their readers and who "saw reader involvement and the submersion of self to be the triumph of art."[172] For better or for worse, James's theories overwhelmed Stevenson's in the world of criticism and became widespread not long after his death.

By the late 1950s, however, this requirement that "the mature reader, qualified to be discriminating, keep his proper distance" from the story became increasingly questioned.[173] In 1961, Wayne Booth's celebrated work *The Rhetoric of Fiction* demonstrated, through an examination of Jane Austen's *Emma*, that the reader's emotional reaction to every fictional event within the novel imitates the character's emotional reaction. In this way, he acknowledged that it does not make one an inferior reader to identify with the characters in a novel. *However*, even while indicating that the most judicious readers can still become involved and immerse themselves in the author's fictional world, before Booth completes this thought, he uses the child as a negative point of reference: "While only immature readers ever really identify with any character, losing all sense of distance and hence all chance of an artistic experience…"[174]

Fortunately, all of these assumptions about children's literature were not universally upheld, otherwise we would only be able to talk about children's book sales, and not children's literature. But, it is important to recognize that for the first part of the twentieth century, children's literature criticism was virtually nonexistent. This meant that children's literature fell behind fiction for adults as far as recognition in the academy. Suffice it to say,

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[172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid., 549.

by following the trajectory of American adult literature[175] during the first half of the twentieth century from its initial neglect to its subsequent secure status in the academy, we are able to witness how, during this same period, children's literature lost its place in serious criticism. *Huckleberry Finn* is a prime example of a novel being forced to take this route. Because it rose in critical esteem, it was redefined as adult literature and elevated to the academy, while the less-regarded *Tom Sawyer* was decidedly labeled a work of children's literature. In addition, in the same way as Burnett's *Fauntleroy*, American works that were once admired were relegated to the nursery by the end of the 1940s—Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were among them. Thus, after the Golden Age, the early 20th century saw children's literature slide back into the shadows.

After the Golden Age: Realistic Fiction

In addition to noting how children's literature moved to the periphery of literary criticism, it is also important to look at some of the literature itself in order to understand how fiction for children continued to grow apart from adult literature during the same period. As Beverly Lyon Clark points out, not only was there a great divide between adult literature and children's literature at this time, but there was also a difference within the genre itself across another divide: the Atlantic Ocean. While authors of British children's literature such as A. A. Milne were still producing works of fantasy fiction in the late 1920s that recognized children's agency and immersion in their culture,[176] literature for children in

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[175] By "adult literature" here I mean prose fiction.

[176] Though, admittedly, in Milne's case, these children are represented as grown-up animals and the sense of nostalgia the novel demonstrates hearkens back to an earlier view of childhood.

America was moving decidedly in the direction of realistic fiction and, consequently, further segregating the child from the adult. Again, the influence of the Second World War was notable during the 1940s, when realistic fiction comprised the majority of books written for children, especially in America.[177] Accordingly, during this period, the fictions that received accolades, like the prestigious Newbury Honor Medal, were primarily categorized as realistic or historical. Notable examples of Newbery Medal Winners as well as Newbery Honor Books at this time include: *Invincible Louisa: The Story of the Author of "Little Woman"* (1934) by Cornelia Meigs, which described the life of Louisa May Alcott; *Caddie Woodlawn* by Carol Ryrie Brink (1936), a work of historical fiction about a girl on the frontier; *Strawberry Girl* (1945), again, similar to *Caddie Woodlawn*; *The Twenty-One Balloons* by William Pène du Bois (1948), which involved an account of a trip around the world, the events and ideas in the novel based on both scientific fact and a bit of imagination; *The Door in the Wall* by Marguerite de Angeli (1950), which, though a novel set in medieval England with knights and their squires, still aimed to be a 'realistic' account of a child's life during that time; and *My Side of the Mountain,* by Jean Craighead George (1960), the story of a boy who goes to live alone in a tree in the Ozark mountains. During this period in history, however, realistic fiction was not what we associate with realism in children's fiction today (what is now called "new realism," which began in the 1970s). Instead of being committed to showing the nitty-gritty details of life, Peter Hunt tells us that these "'middle class' books avoided direct confrontation" because "writing about the child in war (especially during wartime) involves facing the loss (rather than the convenient

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[177] Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 149.

suspension) of adult order."[178] Therefore, as Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig have

observed, although these texts were still considered realistic fiction, "at the end of war, the

bulk of children's fiction was still located in a dream world of boarding school, ponies, the

prevention of crime, impossible reversals of fortune and holiday high-jinks."[179] In this way,

children's literature grew apart from the adult postmodern fiction of that same era, which

highlighted the difficulty of post-war life.[180] Unfortunately, because of this desire for

positive, "upbeat" realistic fiction, as Peter Hunt observes, the line between what he terms

"the mainstream/respectable/literary texts" and "the successors to the penny dreadfuls"

became blurred.[181]

　　　The re-emergence of gendered stories bears witness to both this blurring of the

boundary between the literary and the popular novel as well as to the bifurcation between

adult and children's fiction. Even as female characters in adult works were becoming more

interesting in adult fiction and even as female adult readers broke through the barrier that

James erected for them, female child characters and female child readers were still not on

par with their male counterparts. *The Hardy Boys* series (which first appeared in 1927) and

the *Nancy Drew* series (which first appeared in 1930), both created by publisher Edward

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[178] Ibid., 129.

[179] Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, *Women and Children First* (London: Gollancz, 1978), 238.

[180] These include the works of Samuel Beckett, which emphasize the poverty of language and the failure of humankind.

[181] Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 128. The popular novels of Enid Blyton are good examples of this.

Stratemeyer[182] are examples of the way post-Golden Age children's writers wrote for gendered audiences and the way publishers concerned themselves with sales rather than content.

The Hardy Boys is a series of novels about young amateur boy detectives, sixteen-year-old Frank and fifteen-year-old Joe, who are constantly involved in solving mysteries in their town and its environs. They often help their detective father solve the cases on which he is working, many times aided by their male friends and, less frequently, assisted by their platonic girlfriends. The Nancy Drew series is very similar to the Hardy Boys series in its premise, with Nancy often assisting her lawyer father with his cases, many times being assisted by her two best female friends, Bess Marvin and George Fayne. At other times, she is aided by her boyfriend, Ned Nickerson, a college student. In each series, the plots of the books are the same: a mysterious event, disappearance, accident, etc. occurs, the police are either unable to solve the case or do not believe that there is a case to be solved, the young heroes or heroine take it upon themselves to solve the mystery, often endangering themselves in the process, and, in the end, the mystery is solved and all is well. The only difference, then, is the gender of the characters—and gender stereotypes abound. While Nancy is afforded some freedom because she has been partly orphaned by her mother, her housekeeper does her best to make sure Nancy is raised like a lady.[183] Nancy, despite being (we are supposed to assume) very clever, has completed her education at the high school

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[182] The novels have been written by various ghostwriters. The Hardy Boys were written under the pen name, Franklin W. Dixon and the Nancy Drew stories were all under the pen name, Carolyn Keene.

[183] Carol Billman, The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate: Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, and the Million Dollar Fiction Factory (New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1986), 110.

level (she did not attend college) and now leads the life of a wealthy society girl: volunteering, maintaining a busy social calendar, and participating in athletics such as tennis.[184] Deirdre Johnson writes: "While the Hardy boys do their sleuthing in the outdoors, Nancy Drew's world is more closely tied to society and culture, traditionally the domain of the female."[185] Nancy is never shown as acquiring any job skills (except amateur sleuthing) or working for a living.[186] Johnson also calls attention to the highly romanticized, feminine nature of the "clues" that Nancy finds, which are "dainty mementos—scarlet slippers, ivory charms, and the like."[187]

In addition, much more so than Frank and Joe, socialite Nancy is assisted by other characters to solve the mystery at hand. Oftentimes, this help comes from her boyfriend, Ned, who, although some critics like Carol Billman liken him to a puppy dog and claim that he is always "second in status," nevertheless often saves Nancy just in time from near-fatal accidents.[188] Frank and Joe Hardy, on the other hand, are still in school and their family is described as more middle class (the wealthy—such as Nancy—are characterized as greedy and selfish in this series). Frank and Joe are eager to earn money and routinely accept cash rewards for their sleuthing that are to be put in their college education fund. Unlike Nancy, they are rarely helped by their significant others, and, indeed, in many of the novels the girls are not mentioned, or are mentioned only in passing.

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Deidre Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer and the Stratemeyer Syndicate (*New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 151-152.

[186] Ibid., 152.

[187] Ibid., 151.

[188] Billman, *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate*, 112.

However, what is more interesting to note is the way that these books changed from the period 1927-1959 (or 1930-1959, in Nancy's case) to the period 1959-1979. In her book *Sisters, Schoolgirls, and Sleuths*, Carolyn Carpan tells us that in 1959 both series underwent massive revision mainly because parents wrote to the publishing company to complain about the prevalence of racial and ethnic stereotypes, as well as xenophobia.[189] Other revisions, which occurred simultaneously, revealed just how much children's literature had changed in those three decades, growing farther and farther away from the complex literature for adults. First, the books were shortened from twenty-five chapters to twenty and the writing style became less descriptive and more concise in both dialogue and exposition.[190] Consequently, the books became much more plot-oriented at the cost of character and atmosphere development. "In general," writes Carol Billman, "the style shift in the Hardy Boys books might be characterized as a normalization."[191] Second, vocabulary words that were considered to be too difficult for the young reader were excised, including words such as "ostensible" and "presaged."[192] Slang was also eliminated, as were the more explicit or shocking episodes in the plot. Third, in *Nancy Drew*, the Nancy in the early books, mostly created by ghostwriter Mildred Wirt Benson (born Mildred Augustine), was considerably strong-willed, outspoken, and independent, despite falling into the gender stereotypes mentioned previously. According to Karen Plunkett-Powell, Benson wrote that despite

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[189] Leona W. Fisher, "Race and Xenophobia in the Nancy Drew Novels: "'What kind of society…?'," in *Nancy Drew and Her Sister Sleuths*, ed. Michael G. Cornelius and Melanie E. Gregg (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2008), 65.

[190] Billman, *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate*, 82.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid., 81.

having to comply with the often "hackneyed names and situations" that were delineated by the syndicate, she "concentrated hard on *Nancy*, trying to make her a departure from the stereotyped heroine of my day."[193] However, this more abrasive and matter-of-fact character was not in keeping with editor Edward Stratemeyer's ideas for the heroine. Karen Plunkett-Powell writes that when Mildred Wirt Benson completed *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Mr. Stratemeyer "expressed bitter disappointment when he received the manuscript, saying the heroine was much too flip, and would never be well-received."[194] Benson's editor who succeeded Stratemeyer, Harriet Adams, also felt that it was necessary for Benson to make Nancy's character more restrained and decorous.[195] Plunkett-Powell writes of Adams:

> Harriet's personality was more reserved than Mildred Wirt Benson's, making Harriet's depiction of Nancy Drew more restrained as well. Nancy's brassy qualities were toned down, the texts became noticeably shorter and, some readers feel, rather homogenized—Nancy became a scaled-down version of a supersleuth.[196]

As a result of this new editor, Carole Kismaric and Marvin Heiferman tell us that Nancy became much less bold in her actions and her speech.[197] "Nancy said" became "Nancy said sweetly" in order to make her character a more caring, docile female presence in the novels,

[193] Karen Plunkett-Powell, *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook: 60 Years of America's Favorite Teenage Sleuth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 34.

[194] Ibid., 33.

[195] Carole Kismaric and Marvin Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & The Hardy Boys* (New York: Fireside, 2007), 113.

[196] Plunkett-Powell, *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook*, 38.

[197] Kismaric and Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & The Hardy Boys*, 28.

in keeping with conventional female characters of the period.[198] In a letter to Mildred Wirt Benson, Adams wrote: "Will you stress that Nancy is sensible, level-headed, and very keen, but also sympathetic, kind-hearted, and lovable. Bring out the devotion between father and daughter."[199] In addition, in both series during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Nancy, Frank and Joe became less cheeky and much more respectful of male authority figures (especially the police) who in earlier books were sometimes portrayed as being inept or bumbling.[200] Each of these changes is representative of the more widespread changes occurring in the field of children's literature, all of which helped to put more distance between adults and children during the mid-twentieth century. As children's literature became more and more focused on a particular target audience, the characters within the books became more stereotypically childish and the world within the books narrowed its sphere.

However, by the 1970s realistic fiction for children had made real strides in closing the gender gap and also self-consciously made an effort to acknowledge the complexities of late-twentieth century life by injecting political topics such as class, race, sexuality, and death into their plots. There was, as Peter Hunt calls it, "a swing toward 'new realism'" which involved the publication of realistic fiction for children that was "streetwise" and "multiracial," and "often written from the 'inside.'"[201] It is true that some of these novels, even if they were extremely popular, were not particularly well received by critics due to

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[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid.

[200] Ibid., 114.

[201] Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 127.

their formulaic writing style, "workman-like" prose, and attitude of general hopelessness.[202]

These works of fiction, sometimes called the "anorexic" novels, often tackle adolescent

problems and thus they are sometimes pushed into the category of young adult fiction. A

notable example would be the author Judy Blume, whose books are, Hunt observes, "by

turns edgy and bland, dramatic and displaying the small change of daily life, have been

undervalued by critics."[203] These novels include *Are You there, God? It's Me, Margaret*

(1970), which centers upon a young girl's move into puberty, and *Forever* (1975), which is

the first book to feature explicit teenage sexual activity. However, the attacks on these

books have not targeted the explicitness of the sex or the way these adolescents act outside

the adult moral code, but rather "the *lack* of excitement and mystery," which demonstrates,

according to Hunt, that "the gap between the reading generation and the criticizing

generation is at its widest here."[204]

 But not all of the late twentieth century children's novels that were designed to

illustrate such "problems" were neglected by the critics. Novels such as Virginia

Hamilton's *Zeely* (1967), Cynthia Voigt's Dicey Tillerman series (which begins with

Homecoming, published in 1981), Catherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), and

Betsy Byar's *The Pinballs* (1977) demonstrate the way novelists during this period explored

issues of race, death, and displacement with the intention of showing children how to

survive in a corrupt world, while still challenging their readership with their language and

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[202] Ibid., 150-152.

[203] Ibid., 151.

[204] Ibid.

complexity.[205] Notable examples that "stand out for their sustained wit and intelligence" are

Elaine Konigsberg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs Basil E. Frankweiler* (1967), which

confronts the issue of displacement, Ellen Raskin's *The Westing Game* (1978), a novel that

is a battle of wits between narrator and reader and that won the Newbery Prize, and Louise

Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* (1964), which, as Peter Hunt has pointed out, "seems at first to

be a comedy, but is slowly revealed to be an exploration of the child as victim of rich

metropolitan life—indeed, of a whole life-style."[206] Thus, while realistic fiction for children

suffered a "dumbing-down" in the years after the Golden Age, hopeful signs for a

resurgence of innovative and challenging novels for children began to emerge in the mid-to-

late 20th century.

After the Golden Age: Fantasy Fiction

Let us turn now to fantasy literature in order to determine how this genre affected the

divide between childhood and adulthood and their respective literatures. With a few notable

twentieth-century exceptions, fantasy literature for children has not had a strong presence in

critically acclaimed literature during the past century, especially in America.[207] As Felicity

Hughes has shown, at the turn of the twentieth century the acceptance of realism as the

mode for the serious novel resulted in the exclusion of children from the readership of these

"serious" works for much of the twentieth century. Because of this emphasis placed on

realism, when realistic fiction for children finally started receiving critical attention and

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[205] Ibid., 150.

[206] Ibid.

[207] Ibid., 140.

winning esteem in the 1970s, fantasy literature for children remained marginalized in criticism and in the academy.

After the Golden Age, because realism was allied to the sophisticated novel, fantasy literature for children *and* adults, was "immediately déclassé." Hughes writes:

> Since fantasy can be seen as the antithesis of realism, it seemed to follow, to those who espoused the realist cause, that fantasy was also the opposite of serious, i.e., trivial or frivolous. That is precisely how Forster used the term in *Aspects of the Novel.* […] In those 1927 lectures Forster reflected and helped disseminate a widespread prejudice against fantasy. A consequence of the prejudice that fantasy is childish has been that the writer of fantasy has been directed into writing for children no matter how good he or she might be. The realistic writer has had a choice and indeed been encouraged to regard writing for adults more satisfying. In writing for children the realistic writer has been conscious of taking second best since realism was defined in terms which excluded children as readers hence "real" realism was impossible in a children's book."[208]

However, because fantasy writers have had no choice but for their books to remain part of "low culture, " they have also been free to write their fictions without the shadow of the need for realism hanging over them. They have not had to deal with the restraint imposed upon children's writers of realistic fiction after the Second World War when it comes to topics such as terror, politics, and sex. After all, because a writer cannot be true to life *and* still avoid certain topics, turning to fantasy actually became a solution. Since fantasy was safe from critical attention, it was free to operate away from what Hughes calls "prying adult eyes."[209] As a result, Hughes argues that many excellent writers turned to children's

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[208] Hughes, *Children's Literature: Theory and Practice,* 553-555.

[209] Ibid., 555.

literature, a phenomenon that explains the prevalence and high quality of children's fantasy novels during the twentieth century.[210] Thus, it is true that in the midst of realistic fiction's dominance during the mid-to-late 20th century, there were exceptional writers creating fantasy fiction for children. They, like their Golden Age predecessors, were not content with their generation's view of childhood, so they managed to subvert the strictures placed upon authors of realistic fiction by embracing a different genre—a genre that had fought a narrow-minded view of childhood only a half a century previously. In this way, outstanding works of fiction that respected the intelligence and ingenuity of their child readership were created in the 1950s and 1960s.[211] J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* books are an example of the remarkably intricate worlds that these novelists created, challenging their readers with metaphor, allegory, and allusions to past legends. Other novels helped to give credence to childhood fears, like E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, which abruptly addresses the concern of death in its first line: "Where is Papa going with that axe?" and which, as Peter Hunt has observed, "moves simultaneously from innocence to experience and (paradoxically) from naturalism to fantasy."[212] In addition, Lloyd Alexander's *The High King* (1969) (as well as his other works of fantasy), Madeleine L'Engle's blend of science fiction and the fantastic in *A Wrinkle in Time* (1963), and Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* (1967) all worked to bring attention and admiration to the genre. Garner's works were especially appreciated (at least compared to other children's writers) by both academic and child-orientated critics alike because of his "remarkable exercise in oblique narration" as

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[210] Ibid.

[211] Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 127.

[212] Ibid., 138.

well as the way he is able to, as Hunt puts it, "superimpose" figures and creatures from a wide variety of mythologies.[213]

And yet, much of this attention comes in backward glances, rather than at the time of publication. Most fantasy novels in the 1970s and 1980s were still viewed as part of "lower culture" in contrast to concurrent realistic fictions. As Felicity Hughes pointed out in 1978:

> These admirable novels have not received the critical appreciation
> they deserve. I suggest this stems from the fact that the rejection
> of the child reader by influential critics and writers was
> accompanied by the rejection of fantasy and the associated claim
> that fantasy does not appeal to the mature mind.[214]

But in those same backward glances, we can also see how these novels have paved the way for children's fantasy fiction today. Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy (1967-72), in which Ged's quest narrative parallels the theme of a child's search for identity, is one such work of fantasy. Hunt calls the trilogy "outstanding" and "the work of a philosopher."[215] The novels are primarily concerned with the meaning of death and immortality, a concern that is further explored in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* epic. Le Guin, like Rowling, creates a highly imaginative secondary world and incredibly layered quest story. Through this complexity, Le Guin demonstrates her confidence in her child readers' abilities to face these existential questions and sift through the many layers of complexity of her trilogy. However, Hunt also notes that these books are, like much fantasy literature of that time, sexist and escapist, and it was only in Le Guin's fourth volume, *Tehanu*, which she wrote in 1990, that she redresses

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[213] Ibid., 138-139.

[214] Hughes, *Children's Literature: Theory and Practice*, 557.

[215] Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 140.

the balance. Le Guin discussed her thoughts about the limitations of her earlier novels in a

lecture entitled *Earthsea Revisioned* in 1992:

> Since my Earthsea books were published as children's books, I
> was in an approved female role. So long as I behaved myself,
> obeyed the rules, I was free to enter the heroic realm.   I loved that
> freedom and never gave a thought to the terms of it. Now I know
> that even in fairyland there is no escape from politics. I look back
> and see that I was writing partly by the rules, as an artificial man,
> and partly against the rules, as an inadvertent revolutionary."[216]

Thus, despite their magical settings, Peter Hunt argues that works of fantasy literature in the

1970s and 1980s were "bound by the same politics as rule[d] the primary world" before the

third-wave of feminism in the 1990s.[217]

Another author of fantasy literature for children who has, like Le Guin, demonstrated

his faith in the child reader's precocious competence and his or her ability to successfully

detect, digest, and contend with the concerns in his books is William Mayne. From his

earliest books like *Follow the Footprints* (1953), to his latest works like *Lady Muck* (1997),

Mayne has differentiated himself from other children's fantasy fiction writers by writing

books that cross over the boundary into the style, language, and concerns that have typically

characterized literature for adults since the end of the Golden Age of children's literature.

As Peter Hunt avows, "while other writers demand 'knowledge and experience', Mayne

'presupposes intelligence and a willingness to think hard."[218] Indeed, Mayne said in an

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[216] Ursula Le Guin, *Earthsea Revisioned* (Cambridge: Children's Literature New England in association with Green Bay Publications, 1993), 7.

[217] Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 140.

[218] Ibid., 147.

interview: "It might be a comfort to some child to know that *its* way of thinking is not

necessarily wrong because it's not the "right" way—I don't want them to think that the

accepted way has any more value at all than their own way."[219] Mayne also shows his

confidence in the child's ability to understand and manipulate language. His complex

stylistic tricks subvert expectations of sentence structures and he, like Burnett before him,

often employs difficult dialects (like Yorkshire) for the speech of his characters in many of

his novels. Hunt declares that Mayne's books "require thoughtful, careful reading" and that,

stylistically, "he is an original: because he stands so close to his characters, and frequently

close to their dialect, readers of all ages are inclined to misinterpret him."[220] Indeed, Mayne

is frequently misread, primarily by adults, because, "unused to his demands," they claim that

the complexity of his books is out of place in a genre for children. They also typically try to

read his works for plot, not understanding that pace and drama are not his only focus.[221]

And, even though his novels do lay great emphasis on the plot, they also focus a great deal

on character and place, both of which are of great concern in contemporary children's

fantasy fiction. Peter Hunt argues that:

> William Mayne's [style] is perhaps the most distinctive of all
> children's writers because it is unlike any other. Mayne is a
> paradox, or a conundrum; he has published over 100 books since
> *Follow the Footprints* in 1953, and yet he is not a household name,
> and, where he is known, is often accused of not being a children's
> author at all: perhaps the epitome of that 'adulterated' side of
> publishing for children in which the more a book appears to be like
> an adult book, the more highly it is valued. And yet, with rare
> exceptions, he is also unappreciated by 'adult' critics. This in

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[219] Ibid., 144.

[220] Ibid., 144-145.

[221] Ibid., 144.

itself says a great deal about both the standards of the literary establishment, and the standards of the children's literature establishment.[222]

Though William Mayne might have been a paradox or a conundrum during the time that he wrote his earlier books, I would argue that in the current climate of the children's literature establishment *and* the literary establishment, books like Mayne's are no longer in danger of being accused of not being appropriate for the genre.   Instead, I contend that Mayne can be seen as a forerunner of children's fantasy literature writers today. Through his works, and the works of Le Guin as well as a handful of other children's fantasy writers during the second half of the twentieth century such as Peter Dickinson, Robin McKinley, and Roald Dahl, we witness the first subtle indications of the growing together of children's literature and literature for adults, a revolution in children's literature that I argue was set into motion by the novels of J. K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, Catherynne Valente, Neil Gaiman, Lemony Snicket, and many of their contemporaries. In the next section, I examine the recent critical work of scholars Kimberly Reynolds, Maria Nikolajeva, and, in particular, Perry Nodelman, in an effort to situate my project in the context of contemporary children's literature criticism.

The Hidden Adult: Children's Literature and Children's Literature Criticism Today

In his recent and assiduously thorough investigation of the genre in *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, Perry Nodelman explores the spectrum of positions taken in the burgeoning field of children's literature criticism about the definition of

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[222] Ibid.

"children's literature" in order to better understand the texts themselves. These positions are, as Nodelman notes, sometimes completely dichotomous, sometimes just a hair's breadth apart. For example, some critics and writers of children's literature, like Katherine Jones, Roger Sale, and John Rowe Townsend deny that there is *any* possible definition of children's literature.[223] For each critic, there is a different reason for this impossibility. For Jones, it is because the term itself is so confusing that she argues that it undermines the possibility of even having a distinct genre. For Sale, it is because, in his own experience of writing a book about children's literature, *Fairy Tales and After*, he wrote as an adult for an adult audience, denying "any significant connection to children or their reading."[224] Townsend also communicates the temptation an exasperated scholar might feel:

> Since any line-drawing must be arbitrary, one is tempted to abandon the attempt and say that there is no such thing as children's literature, there is just literature. […] Children are not a separate form of life from people; no more than children's books are a separate form of literature from just books.[225]

Nodelman notes that the reason these critics and writers refuse to acknowledge a clearly delineated definition (because all definitions are, by their very nature, limiting) is to combat the assumption that children's literature cannot or should not be taken seriously by adults. Nodelman explains: "For Sale and others it *can* be taken seriously exactly because it *isn't* unlike other literature. Adults can read it just as they read other, more adult-oriented

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[223] Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 137.

[224] Ibid, 139.

[225] Ibid.

books."[226] Indeed, C. S. Lewis went so far as to say: "I am almost inclined to set it up as a

canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story."[227]

But then, Nodelman tells us, there are critics like Robert Bator who argue that to avoid

definition is to condemn the genre as an unscholarly category:

> To avoid definition may be to flee 'rigid' constraints. But what
> constrains, delimits. Any literature directed at a special audience is
> a necessarily limited literature. Literature for children will remain
> largely a critically uncharted and confusing territory if its
> limitations are not defined.[228]

Or, for other critics and scholars, like Rebecca Lukens, children's literature "differs

in degree but not in kind" from adult literature.[229] Basically, what Lukens and others who

take this position mean is that children's literature is, simply, simpler than adult literature,

but it is still literature.[230] Yet another interpretation, offered by Peter Hunt in his *Criticism,

Theory, and Children's Literature*, includes and excludes works of literature from the genre

"on the basis of what children read and like."[231] Hunt, like Nodelman and Rose, locates the

foundation of his argument in the belief that children's books emerge from adult concepts of

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[226] Ibid., 140.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid., 138.

[229] Ibid., 142.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Ibid., 155.

the child. Thus he argues for a "childist" or child-centered form of children's literature

criticism in which adults would endeavor to read from the child's point of view.[232]

Unlike the majority of other critics who see the differing definitions of children's

literature as mutually exclusive, thereby making conflicting definitions mutually defeating,

Nodelman views the contradictions as reflective of the paradoxes inherent to the genre and,

therefore, mutually *beneficial* to the understanding of the field.[233] He writes:

> I believe that an attempt to understand these differing definitions in
> terms of their complex relationships with each other will reveal not
> just how they interconnect but also how their connections imply an
> underlying and ongoing set of concerns—concerns significantly
> related to ideas about children and about the place of literature in
> the lives of children—that give shape and consistency to the genre
> of children's literature as a whole and reveal ways in which
> apparently quite different texts similarly belong to that genre.[234]

I think Nodelman is correct that these different definitions show us how the category

has formed itself out of the questions its very title raises.[235] In *The Hidden Adult*, Nodelman

contends that children's literature has certain identifiable and characteristic features that help

to define and give coherence to the field. He makes a case, for example, that children's

literature characteristically focuses on events rather than on description or "character

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[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid., 137.

[234] Ibid., 137.

[235] For example, I think that each of these definitions reveals that one of children's literature's
primary concerns is the boundary between children and adults and, that, more and more, this
boundary is dissolving so as to be more easily traversed by texts. But I will discuss this further after
we examine Perry Nodelman's thoughts about these ongoing sets of concerns.

revelation."[236] That children's literature more often than not has a didactic agenda and,

when it is at its best and most effective, this agenda is subtle and sneaky, is another

distinguishing attribute Nodelman identifies as common to almost all literature for children.

The didactic impulse is the result of a lingering feeling of obligation established by John

Locke and the education literature for children that he inspired.   He also notes that

simplicity of language, adherence to conventional story patterns [e.g. home/away/home],

and focalization from a childlike point of view are "key defining markers" of the genre that

"all work to make texts for children more like each other than not."[237] Nodelman goes on to

argue that these underlying samenesses in children's literature "emerge from enduring adult

ideas about childhood and that have consequently remained stable over the stretch of time in

which this literature has been produced."[238] But what are these ongoing adult ideas about

childhood? And, most importantly, *why* do they endure? Like Rose, Nodelman contends

that, since the end of the sixteenth century and the publication of expurgated classics for

children, children's literature remains a literature that censors and excludes. Nodelman goes

on to explain why this is the case:

> But there is something else that adults commonly believe children
> need from their literature: protection, both from knowledge and
> from experience. From this point of view, children's literature
> exists in order to offer children this protection, to exclude things
> they ought not to know about. As I have suggested, what
> children's literature excludes varies from time to time and from
> adult to adult. What has remained almost universally constant
> from the sixteenth century on is the idea that there is something or
> other that children should not learn, should not or cannot know—

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[236] Ibid., 214.

[237] Ibid., 266.

[238] Ibid., 242.

some knowledge they need to be protected from and that children's literature exists exactly in order to exclude.[239]

Though this knowledge that children should not or cannot know, as we have seen with *Peter and Wendy*, constantly seeps through, there has been a concerted effort for the past three quarters of a century to block that knowledge. Nodelman details the broad and diverse range of excludable texts and properties within texts and argues that each case of exclusion indicates a perceived limitation of children.[240] He lists:

> books that adults think children won't like, books adults think children will like but shouldn't, nonchildist books or nonquality books, books with language too complex for children's limited cognitive abilities, texts too long for children's limited attention spans, material too violent for children's tender sensibilities or too sexy for children's innocent purity—or, alternatively, material violent enough and sexy enough to dangerously arouse children's uncontrollable passions.[241]

Nodelman, though he agrees with Rose that children's literature relies on the adult's conception of childhood and that it "might be better defined as the literature adults want and need children to need," he also agrees with Marah Gubar that adults are simultaneously cognizant of their complicated relationship with children within and without the book.[242] Nodelman marries the two seemingly incongruous theories to create his own: he contends that this cognizance manifests itself in what he calls a "shadow text," or an unconscious,

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[239] Ibid., 158.

[240] Ibid., 152.

[241] Ibid., 152.

[242] Ibid., 158.

which is the "variety of forms of knowledge—sexual, cultural, historical—theoretically only available to and only understandable by adults" or, in other words, beyond the ken of childlike consciousness.[243] According to Nodelman, the simple surface of the text sublimates or hides the more complete and complex understanding of the world—a deeper, subtler knowledge that allows for comprehensibility of the simple text.[244] Though the shadow texts remain unspoken or repressed, buried under or within the simple, plot-oriented text of a children's story "that shows, rather than tells," the simple text *implies* more than it says.[245] There is constant slippage between the two texts, simple and shadow, which allows for what Nodelman calls "the hidden adult."[246] This recognition of the shadow text, Nodelman attests, simultaneously gives credence to the theory that children's literature texts imply both a child *and* an adult audience. In addition, this hidden adult audience acts as a guide to the observable child audience, abetting the self-understanding of the child's subjectivity by describing events from a purported childlike view in order to teach the child to enact that childlike view.[247]

Thus, Nodelman reasons, children's literature, like childhood, is "inherently ambivalent—double and divided"; it is outside adult literature but "on the way in."[248] Just as children are different from adults and yet are always in the process of ceasing to be a child,

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[243] Ibid., 206.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Ibid., 243.

[246] Ibid., 206.

[247] Ibid., 243.

[248] Ibid., 304.

children's literature as *children's* literature is different from adult literature, but, Nodelman

argues, because it implies deeper, adult knowledge in the shadow texts, it is constantly in the

process of undermining itself as children's literature. In this way, Nodelman recognizes

what he calls the hybridity of childhood and adulthood, and, in turn, children's literature and

adult literature:

> Implicit in what I've been arguing, of course, is that both
> childhood and adulthood as currently understood are hybrid—that
> there are hidden adult aspects necessary in the self-understanding
> of current childhood subjectivity and that adults must retain and be
> concerned about an uncolonized other within themselves. But both
> childhood and adult subjectivity as currently defined either demand
> the hiding of their hybridity or else acknowledge it only as
> paradox, and both approaches retain the foundational oppositional
> nature of the binaries. Without that foundational opposition and
> that hiding, logic suggests, a literature directed specifically at
> children cannot exist.[249]

I agree with Nodelman that the notions of childhood and adulthood are not mutually

exclusive of one another and that each binary actually incorporates parts of the other.

Indeed, the duality of childhood and adulthood, I think, will forever be a subject of inquiry

for children's literature scholars, critics, and readers. However, a key point of Nodelman's

argument is that hybridity must remain hidden, in the shadows. Or, if a text for children

does acknowledge its own duality, it views this ambiguity as contradictory to the genre's

definition or else it threatens the genre's continuance. Nodelman writes:

> Meanwhile, however, children's literature still continues to be
> marketed as such and, I believe, still bears its foundational markers
> of ambivalence—an ambivalence that does not celebrate its
> hybridity but hides it. The adult understanding hidden in
> children's literature remains hidden, in the shadows, necessarily

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[249] Ibid., 256.

repressed so that both adults and children can continue to understand that childhood is different from and outside adulthood but on the way in.[250]

This is where Nodelman and I are at a variance. It is a truism that childhood is different from adulthood and, thus, children's literature is usually written across a boundary; however, I contend that while perhaps children's literature cannot exist without the tension between these two binaries—because children's literature is, again, usually written by an adult author, published by an adult publisher, and purchased by adult consumers—it can exist and remain *children's* literature without repressing, hiding, or looking askance at its hybridity. I also do not agree that in order to remain children's literature, a text must maintain an unconscious which is beyond the ken of childlike understanding and therefore only accessible to the adult readers of the children's book. Neither do I believe that by tapping into deeper knowledge and mining that knowledge, bringing it to the surface of the text, children's literature will undermine itself as a literary category and no longer be different from adult literature.

Rather, I believe that, though Nodelman could be correct that the "deeper knowledge" to which he refers has remained in the shadows of texts for children throughout the past two centuries, with only moments of slippage to allow us to realize its existence, it is now pushing forward into the light—and doing so with dazzling rather than dire consequences to the genre. Now that it is illuminated, we can see that what has previously defined literature for young people as children's literature must, indeed, change. However, I contend that these changes help to broaden and deepen as well as elevate the genre; they do

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[250] Ibid.

not undermine it. Children's literature remains its own literary category, with identifiable features and defining markers, but instead of continuing to be a category that excludes and censors, it has become a genre that expands and incorporates, effacing boundaries in order to demonstrate its flexibility, ingenuity, and dexterity, and, in this way, it has merited its own place as an academic field of inquiry.

Once again, as in the Golden Age of children's literature, authors of children's books are creating fictions in which they demonstrate their belief in the agency and complexity of the child as well as endeavor to blur the boundary line between children and adults. However, instead of recasting adult fiction for a child audience, or writing books for children with the hidden adult also in mind, or worrying about the adult influence over the impressionable child's subjectivity and thus masking that influence, contemporary writers of children's fantasy literature celebrate rather than conceal the merging of childhood and adulthood, an impulse re-initiated by the works of J. K. Rowling. Like the authors of children's literature during the Victorian and Edwardian periods, these contemporary authors view the precocity of their child protagonists and readers in a positive way and write stories that expose this sophistication. Indeed, contemporary children's fiction can be seen as a kind of renaissance, a revival and advancement of the diversity and complexity of literature written during the Golden Age. But there is one key difference: because there is no longer an effort to hold onto the myth of childhood innocence and inexperience as there certainly was during the Golden Age, contemporary literature for children is finally as "free" as adult literature—it can finally, to borrow James's phrase, "do simply everything."

There is another point in *The Hidden Adult* with which I take issue: Nodelman claims that there are key defining markers of children's literature that "all work to make

texts for children more like each other than not."[251] These indicators include: simplicity, adherence to conventional story patterns, and focalization from a childlike point of view. He argues:

> What is generally true must then be true of specifics—of specific kinds of books and of specific characteristics in those books. Underlying the apparent distinctness of powerfully innovative texts for children must be an accordance with the established habitus of the field of children's literature. Such texts can be distinct or unique only in ways that offer no real challenge to the basic structure and values of the field as it already is.[252]

But I would like to argue that this is no longer true; the innovative works of children's literature of the past two decades, beginning with Rowling's novels, are so revolutionary and so challenging to the established habitus of the field that they are actually *redefining* its structure and values. As this is occurring, children's literature and adult literature are growing ever closer together. Thus, I do not believe that children's stories today are the simple, plot-oriented texts with shadow texts lurking beneath. Children's stories may have an adult audience, not because their child readers need that hidden adult audience to act as a guide to their own subjectivity, but because the new structure and values are also appealing to adults. This means that children's literature is now being written in the same way that adult literature is written. Therefore, the authors of children's literature are not addressing two audiences but one audience, comprised of both children and adults, who are exposed to the same information. There is no hidden knowledge meant only for adults to understand. Rather, writers like Rowling write their stories in such a way as to demonstrate their

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[251] Ibid., 266.

[252] Ibid., 310.

confidence that their child readers are as equal to the task of gathering and understanding

information as their adult readers. And, indeed, Nodelman even admits in *The Hidden Adult*

that the Harry Potter books, because they are so different from what has characterized

previous children's fantasy fiction in their complexity, detail, and decidedly dual audience,

might completely destabilize his argument:

> The Harry Potter series has attracted a wide audience of adult
> readers—a fact that might undermine the case I am trying to make
> in this book that texts written for children have distinct
> characteristics. If adults can read and enjoy Harry Potter as they
> read and enjoy novels written specifically for adults, then are the
> Potter books really so different? And if the Potter books typify
> children's literature as a genre, is children's literature really so
> different?[253]

The answer, then, is: No. Rather, what has typified the genre has changed radically in the

past two decades, allowing for complexity in children's literature that had once theoretically

distinguished it from adult literature.

But Nodelman also believes that children's literature must be less complex and

sophisticated than adult literature in order to avoid jeopardizing its position as a unique

category. He disagrees with children's literature scholars like Eliza Dresang and Maria

Nikolajeva who claim children's literature has been evolving or even undergoing "radical

change." Dresang sees a transformation in literature for youth emerging from and related to

the digital age and cites "hypertextuality, multiple focalization, and openness to random

access of information as presented online."[254] However, in a careful analysis of the texts,

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[253] Ibid., 338.

[254] Ibid., 277.

Nodelman makes the case that the novels Dresang touts as exemplary of radical change still betray their underlying similarity to conventional children's literature. He writes, "What appears to be a divergence from the norm of children's literature is actually a variation on it—an amplification of some of its most fundamental effects."[255] Addressing the arguments of Maria Nikolajeva, who believes that an evolution in children's literature is occurring due to the pressure to create something that subverts what has become the central literary code of literature for children, Nodelman again disagrees that this subversion has resulted in something wholly new. He contends that a subversion of the central code of children's literature may occur in texts, but that it does not result in a more sophisticated literature:

> Children's literature can evolve and in doing so become more sophisticated; but if it becomes *too* sophisticated, then it is in danger of losing exactly that which distinguishes it as a type of literature: its lack of sophistication.[256]

If a text becomes too complicated in its language, character development, subject matter, or themes, Nodelman declares that it jeopardizes its status as a category separate from adult fiction. Even Maria Nikolajeva seems to agree with him when she suggests in her article "Exit Children's Literature" that "an ever-growing segment of contemporary children's literature is transgressing its own boundaries, coming closer to mainstream literature."[257]

In addition, Nodelman also tries to make the case that even if, hypothetically, newer texts for young people became more sophisticated and more radical and yet remained within

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[255] Ibid., 281.

[256] Ibid., 286.

[257] Ibid.

the category of children's literature, these texts would necessarily be less evolved or less

radical than equivalently inventive texts for adults:

> In fact, and despite their sophistication in relation to more
> conventional texts of children's literature of both the past and
> present, all the texts that Dresang and Nikolajeva single out as
> examples of significant change in recent children's literature are
> still less complex, less sophisticated, less radical, less evolved than
> the equivalently radical or innovative texts of adult literature.
> They *must* be so. A defining quality of children's literature is that,
> no matter how complex it is, it tends to be understood as simpler
> than adult texts of the equivalent kind. It may contain hidden
> depths—indeed, I have argued it almost always does. But it
> announces itself as simple, and simpler than what is offered
> adults.[258]

Again, I disagree. To declare that children's literature will cease to exist if it

becomes too complex or too sophisticated is to do a great disservice to the category. (We

might as well be Henry James.) Its complexity is not, as Nodelman argues, "of a very

specific and different sort," but is rather revealed to be the same kind of complexity as exists

within adult literature: there is stylistic sophistication, experimentation with structure and

form, and thematic boldness.[259] And, because of the undeniable presence of these things in

contemporary children's literature, even Nodelman admits on the last page of his book that

the boundaries between children's literature and other literature might be less firm than he

has implied.

Finally, I would like to argue that contemporary children's fantasy literature does

not, as Nodelman claims, have more in common with popular literature than the great works

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[258] Ibid.

[259] Ibid., 341.

of literature of the past. I do, perhaps, agree with Nodelman that the most of the literature written for children this past century, especially those works written immediately after the end of the Golden Age, might, as Nikolajeva claims, be closer to mainstream literature than the adult literature that James would have deemed worthy of "high culture." But I think this association has now changed completely. Rather, works like J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* epic, Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, Catherynne Valente's *Fairyland* series, Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* and *Coraline*, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, and a growing number of other books written for children at the turn of the twenty-first century have more in common with the great books of the past that have constituted an essential foundation in the literature of Western culture, a claim which I will explore in great detail in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. As a consequence, I will also argue that, because of its complexity and resemblance to these works that have profoundly shaped the literary tradition, "children's literature" should finally be afforded its own place in the academy.

Ultimately, I argue that with J.K. Rowling's series we witness the beginning of a new era of children's literature that demonstrates that the category has finally grown up, or, as Aslan would put it, "further up and further in." I am not alone in my hypothesis about the present and future conditions of the children's novels. Scholars like Neil Postman (*The Disappearance of Childhood*, 1982), Rebecca Knuth (*Children's Literature and British Identity: Imagining a People and a Nation*, 2012), Colin Manlove (*From Alice to Harry Potter*: *Children's Fantasy in England*, 2003), Seth Lerer (*Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*, 2008), and Kathryn James (*Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature*, 2009) have written about the increasingly

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blurred boundary line between literature for children and literature for adults. Additionally, many of the works of scholarship specific to the most widely read novels in the contemporary children's literature category, *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, also reject the idea that these two series adhere to the traditions of earlier fictions for children (see, for example, *Political Issues in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series* edited by Dedria Bryfonski, *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter* edited by Lana A. Whited, *His Dark Materials Illuminated* edited by Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott, *The Politics of Harry Potter* by Bethany Barratt, *From Homer to Harry Potter* by Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara, *Killing the Imposter God: Philip Pullman's Spiritual Imagination in 'His Dark Materials'*, by Donna Freitas and Jason King, and *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter* edited by Elizabeth E. Heilman). However, for the most part, works of criticism that call into question the divide between these two categories tend to focus on the increasing thematic boldness in texts for children and cite this as the reason for their coming together in recent years. And, indeed, while I agree that thematic restrictions no longer seem to apply to the category and that children's literature has broken through the boundaries of previously tabooed subjects by incorporating such "threatening" themes as death, depression, atheism, homosexuality, gender bending, rape, and distopia, I am more interested in the way contemporary texts for children have changed in their literariness through their stylistic sophistication and narrative complexity. In this way, my project more closely allies itself with the recent work of Kimberley Reynolds and Juliet Dusinberre, whose scholarship challenges the notion that children's literature is innately conservative in its form or style. For example, in her book *Alice to the Lighthouse*, Juliet Dusinberre illuminates the influence of children's literature on the modernist movement, focusing in particular on Lewis Carroll's

Alice books and their influence on Virginia Woolf and her generation of writers. Dusinberre argues that, despite Rose's assertions to the contrary, there are countless examples of children's books written in the last century that escape the "limits of how far children's literature is allowed to go in upsetting a specific register of representation."[260] While Dusinberre's evidence of stylistic sophistication in texts like *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Secret Garden* is critical for the understanding of children's literature's unacknowledged impact upon modernist writers for adults, she, of course, must limit her argument to children's texts written during the Golden Age. For Reynolds, whose contentions are perhaps the most closely aligned with my own, children's literature is, and has always been, "a breeding ground and an incubator for innovation."[261] In her book, *Radical Children's Literature*, Reynolds discusses the cultural debt owed to children's literature as a source of literary inspiration for adults. She also argues that the boundaries between children's literature and adult literature have become less stable than they once were and argues that children's literature, too, makes aesthetic and intellectual demands upon its readers. However, although I agree with Reynolds' argument, I find that I am more concerned with texts that are considered children's literature or middle grade than with the extremes of the spectrum, picture books and young adult fiction. Thus, while at different points in this project I find common ground with all of these scholars, my intention in the pages that follow of this dissertation is to both synthesize and advance their arguments with my own.

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[260] Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 139.

[261] Kimberley Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*, (New York: MacMillan, 2007), 15.

Part II

Chapter Three
Marauding the House of Fiction
Or
Rowling Breaks Through

In this chapter, I will begin my exploration into the way contemporary children's literature writers employ traditional literary elements like intertextuality as techniques in order to establish in their works a seriousness of purpose and create a new kind of literature for children that is sophisticated in its narrative style.

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other.
-Henry James[262]

One must not think slightingly of the paradoxical…for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity.
-Søren Kierkegaard[263]

While she slept she had a dream. She dreamt that the Neverland had come too near and that a strange boy had broken through from it. He did not alarm her, for she thought she had seen him before in the faces of many women who have no children. Perhaps he is to be found in the faces of some mothers also. But in her dream he had rent the film that obscures the Neverland, and she saw Wendy and John and Michael peeping through the gap.
-J.M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*[264]

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[262] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (London: Everyman, 1995), 5.

[263] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[264] Barrie, J. M, *Peter and Wendy* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 12.

In Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, Mary Malone laboriously turns a slate of what was once resinous, opaque sap into a clear amber spyglass that allows her to finally see *Dust,* or *sraf*, the physical manifestation of consciousness that permeates the new world in which she finds herself.   By expanding the view of her surroundings in this manner, Mary crosses the boundary between innocence and knowledge and is able to comprehend her mission and purpose in the story. She says to the *mulefa* leader: "I will try very hard to help you, and now I have seen *sraf*, I know what it is that I am doing. Thank you for trusting me."[265] By broadening her focus and allowing herself to explore all possible angles of her situation, Mary comes to a deeper understanding of herself and her world. She also, in the eyes of the *mulefa*, graduates to a new level of being—from one who lacked crucial knowledge and understanding to one who now has an excess of both, in addition to the unique qualities that set her apart in the first place. And these qualities, along with her newfound knowledge, not only change Mary's identity, but they can also mean salvation for the increasingly threatened *mulefa*. Their leader, Sattamax, tells her: "You can see things that we cannot, you can see connections and possibilities and alternatives that are invisible to us, just as *sraf* was invisible to you. And while we cannot see a way to survive, we hope that you may."[266]

In the following pages, I argue that contemporary children's literature is now doing a very similar thing: broadening its identity in order to deepen and elevate the genre, exploring knowledge that was once concealed from child readers, experimenting with style and forms, and thereby rescuing children's literature from detractors who refuse to acknowledge it as

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[265] Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (New York: Random House, 2000), 234-235.

[266] Pullman, *Amber Spyglass*, 234.

"serious" literature or high art—or in other words, as literature that is complex, multifaceted, and worthy of the same kind of academic inquiry that is afforded adult literature. As the *mulefa* trust Mary Malone to be able to solve their problem, contemporary writers for children, led by J.K. Rowling, display a similar faith in their child readers, trusting them to be able to see the connections and alternatives and possibilities as well as understand the "dark matters" that were once hidden from them and visible only to the adult audience. Rather than accepting reigning opinions about what constitutes children's literature, they have instead, with their novels, actually changed the identifiable features and defining markers by which children's literature was previously defined. In this way, these authors have instigated a reimagining of what constitutes children's literature—they have changed the way in which children's literature is written and received. By adding layer upon layer to its identity, children's fantasy literature is currently becoming a category that, like adult literature, expands and incorporates rather than excludes and censors and, in the process, becomes its own validating force.

But precisely how do Rowling, Pullman, and other contemporary authors achieve this unprecedented freedom in their novels for children? How have they created fictional works for children that are so revolutionary in their narrative style and so challenging to the established habitus of the field in their content that they have actually redefined its structure and values? How is it that these writers have successfully managed to write fiction that both remains children's literature and yet escapes the strictures and limits that have previously confined it? In other words, how did they manage to write "grown-up" children's literature?

In the following pages, I will explore the way contemporary children's literature employs traditional literary techniques found in previous fictions for both children and

adults in order to create something new. Rowling has written her novels in such a way that they grow with the child reader; the significance of the language, characters, settings, and themes of each installment only yield to the reader's understanding when s/he has pursued and reflected upon each mysterious thread of the great web of story Rowling has spun. In this way, Rowling's novels destabilize the reader's expectations by presenting a multiplicity of cultural codes and ideological indicators for the reader to uncover. Thus, Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is a culmination of two traditions: the tradition of the *readerly* children's book and the tradition of the *writerly* adult novel. It is because the two come together so seamlessly in her work that her novels appeal to both audiences at the same time, without conspiring with one against the other. With the fairy tales, mythologies, legends, and histories that she weaves into her texts, Rowling incorporates previous defining characteristics of children's fantasy literature and taps into cultural memory; with her technical skill, she gives us the realism and verisimilitude that attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience—and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective—which has become the adult novel's defining feature. Therefore she has not, as Bloom attests, contributed to the dumbing-down of culture. Rather, she has "inaugurated a new literary impulse."[267]

Intertextuality or How Children's Fiction Works

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[267] Maria Tatar, *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 173. Children's literature scholar Maria Tatar writes that J. M. Barrie "inaugurated a new literary impulse" with his play *Peter Pan* and his novel *Peter and Wendy*. I believe Rowling, nearly a century later, is taking up Barrie's mantle and changing children's literature as we know it.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, perhaps the most common criticism that is made against J. K. Rowling and other contemporary writers for children is that their works are derivative. Harold Bloom compared *Harry Potter* to *Tom Brown's School Days*, re-seen in "the magical mirror of Tolkien," while authors like Lemony Snicket and Suzanne Collins have come under fire for having a "formulaic" and "repetitive" style. Even Philip Pullman, whose books normally escape the critical fire, has been reproached for the way he at once disparages C. S. Lewis while at the same time plucking scenes and characters from the Narnia plot (see, for instance, Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia*).[268] But what seems to be the most problematic about this so-called imitative style is that it leaves critics unconvinced of the seriousness of the texts. In other words, if a children's book like *Harry Potter* embraces a "schoolboy ethos," this must indicate the absence of what would be the corresponding adult ethos, i.e. a mature aesthetic philosophy. Blooms doubts very much that *Harry Potter* will ever be a classic of children's literature because he believes it lacks an "authentic imaginative vision" and has "aesthetic weaknesses." But this supposition that a schoolboy ethos leads to an impoverished aesthetic vision rings false if we take into consideration both the history of children's literature and the definition of a classic.

What is important to consider here, on the one hand, is the *popularity* of children's novels that revolve around similar plots— the schoolboy plot in Harry Potter, the love-triangle in the Hunger Games trilogy, the heroic underdog (or undermouse, as it were) in *The Tale of Despereaux*, the young girl swept off to a fairy land by a mischievous male, or

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[268] This same complaint is made about adult literature that critics deem childish, like Wood's critique of *The Goldfinch*. What is interesting is that, if we return to Wood's review of *The Goldfinch*, the same criticism is made of adult novels who also seem to adopt echoes of children's stories. It's a new kind of literature or a return to what the novel once was, but with improvements.

the nefarious attentions of a cold woman against a tempted youth in *His Dark Materials*—

versus, on the other hand, a *seriousness of purpose*. For some critics of the contemporary

children's novel (Bloom, A.S. Byatt, Philip Hensher, John Pennington) as well as the

contemporary adult novel (James Wood, Francine Prose, Lorin Stein), the two seem to be

mutually exclusive. This adoption of a timeworn plot indicates a dearth of originality that is

fundamental to high art. Thus, if Rowling repurposes *Tom Brown*, a novel that was once

popular fiction but never serious literature, the resulting *Harry Potter* becomes, in turn,

something to be consumed rather than digested—merely candy for the brain or "cheesecake

for the mind," as Steven Pinker puts it: amusing, familiar, easily devoured, but lacking in

essential, life-sustaining nutrients. However, even a cursory glance at the history of the

novel, children's or otherwise, reveals that this cannot be the case. The novel has always

been an avid collector, gathering up a myth here, a parable there, since its inception.

Scholars with such prodigious knowledge of the literary as Bloom and Wood, are, of course,

aware of what Philip Pullman would call the novel's "magpie-like tendency"[269] and, indeed,

they venerate it (see, for instance, Bloom's *Anatomy of Influence* and Wood's *How Fiction

Works*). Therefore, the problem lies not in the employment of other fictions, but in what

kinds fictions these new novelists are collecting and how they are repurposing what they

harvest from other sources. Bloom's problem with Rowling is that, in her first novel, she

tethers together elements from a popular, mid-nineteenth century, realistic novel for children

with, horror of horrors, elements from 20th century "genre" fiction. Similarly, James

Wood's problem with Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* is that her characters sometimes smack

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[269] Philip Pullman, "Philip Pullman: a life in writing," *The Guardian* (3 March 2011).

of Dickensian caricature while her plot, he argues, falls prey to Nesbittian improbability.[270] But because these contemporary novels incorporate elements from other works that many critics deem "lesser" fictions, must this mean that these new novels, too, are disqualified as art? In other words, is it true that two *so-called* "wrongs" can never make a right?

My answer is, of course, no, this cannot be true. If this were the case, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, which incorporates elements of the erotic novel, the novel of manners, and even the (lowliest-of-the-low[271]) mystery novel, would not be considered as one of the greatest literary achievements of the twentieth century. But one of the reasons for *Lolita's* greatness lies in Nabokov's ability to synthesize heterogeneous elements from a myriad of texts in order to shape his own novel's meaning. Because of the numerous and multifarious intertextual elements in Nabokov's novel—his parody of Joyce's stream of consciousness[272], employing T. S. Eliot's rhythm and use of anaphora in *Ash Wednesday* when Humbert Humbert proclaims that Clare Quilty must die[273], the parallel of his double-named protagonist to Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson*, a man haunted by his doppelganger, just to name a few—*Lolita* can be decoded as a response to the erotic novel, or as a late modernist literary experiment, or as an elaborate metaphor for totalitarianism, or as part of some other conversation, or as part of all of these conversations at once. Thus, as Malcolm Bradbury contends, "at first famous as an erotic novel, *Lolita* soon won its way as a literary

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[270] Wood, "The New Curiosity Shop," 2013.

[271] Get it?

[272] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. (New York: Vintage, 1955), 109 (Chapter 26 of Part One).

[273] Ibid., 296 (Chapter 35 of Part Two).

one—a late modernist distillation of the whole crucial mythology."[274] For scholars like

Bradbury, one of the predominant reasons Nabokov's *Lolita* has achieved the status of a

literary classic is that *Lolita* is the culmination and the apotheosis of multiple literary

traditions; allusions, parodies, pastiches, and references to both popular and serious fictions

comingle in Nabokov's novel, making it at once a feat of regeneration and also wholly

unique. As a result, it would seem that the novel's popularity does not interfere with its

aesthetic philosophy or its seriousness of purpose. Thus, it is the way that Nabokov revels

in intertextuality that allows *Lolita* a place among the great works of literature.

Indeed, for most literary scholars, intertextuality is crucial to the very definition of a

classic. For example, T.S. Eliot, another scholar and writer famous for his own magpie-like

tendencies, argues that a classic *must* adapt and make use of the discoveries, traditions, and

inventions that were present in previous texts. In his essay, "What is a classic?," Eliot writes

that to achieve the kind of maturity necessary for a work to become a classic, humankind

must have:

> a critical sense of the past, a confidence in the present, and no
> conscious doubt of the future. In literature, this means that the
> poet is aware of his predecessors, and that we are aware of the
> predecessors behind his work, as we may be aware of ancestral
> traits in a person who is at the same time individual and unique.
> The predecessors should be themselves great and honoured: but
> their accomplishment must be such as to suggest still undeveloped
> resources of the language, and not such as to oppress the younger
> writers with the fear that everything that can be done has been
> done, in their language. The poet, certainly, in a mature age, may
> still obtain stimulus from the hope of doing something that his
> predecessors have not done; he may even be in revolt against them,
> as a promising adolescent may revolt against the beliefs, the habits
> and the manners of his parents; but, in retrospect, we can see that

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[274] Malcolm Bradbury, *Dangerous pilgrimages: transatlantic mythologies and the novel*. (New York: Viking, 1996), 451.

he is also the continuer of their traditions, that he preserves essential family characteristics, and that his difference of behaviour is a difference in the circumstances of another age."[275]

Here, Eliot insists that a classic must recall its predecessors in its language, themes, and style, as a visage might recall its bloodlines through the quirk of the eyebrows, the set of the jaw, or the shape of the nose. And yet Eliot also echoes James in his belief that literature can and must "do everything," must experiment, must push boundaries in order to attain the status of high art. Confidence in the present and future is dependent upon a "critical sense of the past," but the idea that not everything that can be done has been done is what inspires the creation of a classic. Eliot also insists that a classic must invoke predecessors who, in turn, are "great and honoured," an idea which is perhaps unconsciously echoed by Bloom and Wood in their aforementioned respective essays. It is true that the works of Virgil, the poet about whom Eliot wrote his essay, recall Homeric epic as well as other "honoured" poets like Apollonius of Rhodes and the Latin poet Ennius. In this way, Eliot wishes to demonstrate that Virgil's works are "classics" because the Roman poet refined and distilled already "great" works into what is, certainly, a masterpiece. As we have witnessed with *Lolita*, as well as what we find in countless other classic literary texts like *Don Quixote*, *Ulysses*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Jane Eyre*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Madame Bovary*, etc., many, if not all, of our greatest works of Western literature can find their roots in the most popular and pedestrian of predecessors: the erotic novel, the gothic novel, chivalric romance, the pastoral novel, the oral tale, the children's book, and even the catechism. These types of popular fictions were hardly "honoured" or privileged by the literary establishment, yet it

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[275] T.S. Eliot, *The Select Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 119.

cannot be denied that they have played an important role in the history of the novel, nor can it be said that they do not resurface, intertextually, in some of Western culture's most defining and preeminent works of literature. They are almost "too familiar to be visible," to borrow a phrase from Wood. Therefore, while I do not agree that the texts to which another text refers (or from which it borrows) must themselves fall under the category of "great" or "honoured" or "serious" literature in order for the resulting text to be considered a "classic," I agree with Eliot that literariness is the criterion; these texts must preserve essential family characteristics and an awareness of tradition. These characteristics may not be the most sober or elegant markers of the pedigree, but they do reveal the literary heritage behind the new addition to the lineage.

Which brings me back to children's literature. Like adult literature, the category of children's literature, too, resembles the magpie. And, what is more, it is especially in the Golden Age (or "Classic Age") that we witness this tendency to collect, repurpose, and revitalize/reintroduce previous texts. Again, as in adult literature, literature for children was not fettered by false snobbery, but found its inspiration in the most basic and popular sources.

For example, perhaps the two most famous texts of the Golden Age, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, are themselves, like Neverland and Wonderland, "nicely crammed" with allusions to other popular works for children. The *Alice* books and *Peter and Wendy* are full to bursting with poems mimicking cautionary tales, with nursery rhymes gone awry, with episodes at once familiar to children (by means of their primers and games) but reworked as to become revitalized and new, and with nearly every page peppered with characters prevalent in adventure stories, alphabet books, and fairy tales. Indeed, the very

identities of Wonderland and Neverland are dependent upon these intertextual elements.

When Barrie describes Neverland to his readers, he tells us:

> I don't know whether you have ever seen a map of a person's mind. Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you, and your own map can become intensely interesting, but catch them trying to draw a map of a child's mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time. There are zigzag lines on it, just like your temperature on a card, and these are probably roads in the island, for the Neverland is always more or less an island, with astonishing splashes of colour here and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing, and savages and lonely lairs, and gnomes who are mostly tailors, and caves through which a river runs, and princes with six elder brothers, and a hut fast going to decay, and one very small old lady with a hooked nose. It would be an easy map if that were all, but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers, the round pond, needle-work, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative, chocolate pudding day, getting into braces, say ninety-nine, three-pence for pulling out your tooth yourself, and so on, and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing, especially as nothing will stand still.[276]

Here, Barrie references characters found in fairy tales and fables (the tailor-gnomes, the young prince, the old crone, the hut), hints at adventure stories like *The Coral Island* (the coral reef, the rakish-looking craft, the savages and lairs), alludes to knowledge communicated through primers, catechisms, and other school books (religion, murders, verbs, reciting up to ninety-nine) along with a myriad of other things with which children concern themselves. In this way, this paragraph can likewise be read as a commentary on children's literature: Barrie not only draws a map of Neverland and the child's mind, but also of the children's literature category, the way it constantly circles back around itself in

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[276] Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*, 9.

order to proceed and succeed in creating something that is at once wholly unique and new, and yet entirely familiar. He explains this in the paragraph directly following:

> Of course the Neverlands vary a good deal. John's, for instance, had a lagoon with flamingoes flying over it at which John was shooting, while Michael, who was very small, had a flamingo with lagoons flying over it. John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a wigwam, Wendy in a house of leaves deftly sewn together. John had no friends, Michael had friends at night, Wendy had a pet wolf forsaken by its parents, but on the whole the Neverlands have a family resemblance, and if they stood still in a row you could say of them that they have each other's nose, and so forth. On these magic shores children at play are for ever beaching their coracles [simple boat]. We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more.[277]

The Darling children's Neverlands, like children's literature, and like Eliot's "classics," have a family resemblance that reveals itself through intertextual elements. Carroll's Alice came into being when the world of the female child still remained predominantly in the sphere of governesses and nursemaids, when children had to learn their catechisms and recite their grammar lessons, and when literature for children predominantly concerned itself with a child's education and future assimilation into society. Therefore Carroll, as we know, humorously employed these kinds of texts in his own novels as a way in which to conspire with the child against the adult. Carroll turned catechisms on their heads, parodying Isaac Watts and Robert Southey; he poked fun at the Victorian aristocracy through the Duchess and the Queen of Hearts; he even attacked the most sacred of all British rituals, the tea ceremony, with the infamous Mad Hatter scene. Barrie, who wrote his *Peter Pan* novels and plays more than four decades after the *Alice* books, was thus able to benefit

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[277] Ibid.

from the nonsense literature begun by Carroll as well as Edward Lear. Because these now-popular novels and poems were concerned less with the child's edification than with pleasing and engaging the child, it was possible for Barrie to throw convention out of the nursery window and draw attention to the pitfalls of a patriarchal society by making a Newfoundland dog a nursemaid, turning a schoolgirl into a mother of orphans, and mocking a pirate whose two greatest fears were a ticking reptile and a little boy who still had his first teeth. Like Carroll, Barrie also incorporated elements of other popular texts that were written for children during the latter part of the nineteenth century, like R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858) adventure novel as well as Seymour Hicks's pantomime, *Bluebell in Fairy Land* (1901), at times caricaturing their drama or elaborating upon their magical settings.

In this way, these two authors, as Maria Tatar writes, inaugurated a new impulse in the category of children's literature by rejecting didactic literature in favor of literature that would engage the child reader by addressing his/her thoughts, desires, and concerns, and would preoccupy itself with what is on or in the child's mind.[278] Though this was an entirely new way of writing for children, because early Golden Age writers like Carroll and Barrie presented the child with a child's view of the world by referring (though often in jest) to what was familiar, fantasy literature became a way to subvert expectations about children's literature, but also validate its tradition. Thus, as they simultaneously shaped their own novels' meanings by borrowing and transforming prior texts for children, they also maneuvered their way into the children's literature category and, what is more, created

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[278] Tatar, *Enchanted Hunters*, 173.

a new space in its tradition. And, while Carroll and Barrie drew upon their predecessors and contemporaries to create their stories and change the category, so now does contemporary children's literature repeat and refine this literary technique. This time, however, it is important to note that a couple of things have changed:

First, and most obviously, because more time has passed and more literature for children has been written, contemporary writers for children can cast a wider net when they go fishing for sources of inspiration. For example, though Bloom criticizes Rowling for Hogwarts's resemblance to the rugby school in *Tom Brown's School Days*, perhaps what he forgets is that the British school story has become an integral part of the children's literature category over the past hundred and fifty years. Billy Bunter's *Greyfriar's School*, the day schools and boarding schools in Roald Dahl's childhood memoirs as well as the domain of the Trunchbull made famous in his *Matilda*, Mr. Chips's *Brookfield*, Enid Blyton's posh girls' schools, etc., have become familiar fixtures in books for children during the twentieth century. These books reflect a society that has relocated children's education, moving it out of the nursery and into the schoolroom. Indeed, because of the growing number of child labor laws and the institution of mandatory education during the past century, a significant portion of a child's life now takes place not in the home, but at the school. Thus, the British school stories written in the past hundred years reflect a new and different kind of childhood than that of Alice. At the start of the Golden Age, Carroll referred to the tradition of alphabet books and primers that the child encountered through a tutor or a governess because that was what his child readers would recognize. Barrie, writing four decades later, was able to again expand upon the work Carroll had begun by alluding to the adventure novels and nonsense poetry that had been written in the interim between *Alice in*

Wonderland and *Peter and Wendy*, but also by referring to the school story.[279] Harry's

Hogwarts therefore refers to this tradition of texts because the contemporary child's sphere

of life has expanded from the home to the school.

Second, but still related to this first point, is that as children's literature established

itself as a category, so too did it mature. As Barrie reflected the child's widening sphere of

knowledge and experience by reworking many of the themes, episodes, and techniques that

Carroll introduced with his Alice books, he also raised the stakes to make his story more

dangerous, more complex, and more serious; the Darling children, unlike Alice, do not

"wake up" from their dream when things become too dangerous. Like Alice, the Darlings

must survive the perilous journey to their fantasy world, but they must also survive the

journey home. The Darling children do not wake up when they feel most threatened;

instead, Barrie regularly intimates (through the "thinning" out of the Lost Boys, the murders

of the pirates, the casualties of the tribal wars, and the ticking of the crocodile) that

Neverland, unlike Wonderland, has real dangers and real consequences. Drink a bottle of an

unknown substance or eat a pretty cake in Wonderland and you will grow and shrink; do the

same in Neverland and you will meet your death. In Barrie's story, time passes, people age,

and life is not a dream, but dying becomes the next great and possible adventure.

Additionally, though Carroll hints at the deep anxieties children have in their tenuous

state of in-between-ness, he was primarily concerned with the child's own fears and

concerns about their place in the world, rather than what adults feared and thought about

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[279] Interestingly, while Thomas Hughes's novel is never mentioned explicitly, through the dialogue of the male Darlings, the Lost Boys, and Peter, Barrie also makes reference to the kind of education young boys would receive at schools like Rugby, a training process so repulsive to Peter that it is the reason he ran away to Neverland in the first place.

children. Forty years later, Barrie, as discussed in the previous chapter, not only expressed the fears and concerns of the Edwardian child, but he was also able to subtly communicate the adult unease that permeated Edwardian society about children's knowledge and experience, an anxiety that would grow with Freud's discovery of the unconscious and the recognition of childhood sexuality. The Golden Age of children's literature was thus a period in which the category of children's literature grew exponentially in its narrative style, in its thematic boldness, and in the way in which it addressed its readers. In this period, children's literature comfortably rubbed shoulders with literature for adults, and often stories for children, as in the case of *Peter Pan*, as well as other texts written by Golden Age writers like Robert Louis Stevenson, Anna Sewell, George MacDonald, Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, Edward Lear, and Frances Hodgson Burnett, were enjoyed by adults.[280]

Now, because these Golden Age writers made it possible for the category to expand in both size and profundity, contemporary children's literature is able to further stretch the limits of the category, eventually (as I will argue) effacing them. Beginning in the early 1990s, children's literature entered a new phase, an age where a maturity of language and a community of taste distinguished its works from previous fictions for children written during the twentieth century. T.S. Eliot tells us that:

> The maturity of a literature is the reflection of that of the society in
> which it is produced: an individual author—notably Shakespeare
> and Virgil—can do much to develop his language: but he cannot

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[280] However, as discussed in the second chapter, the period between the turn of the 20th century and the first World War also marked an era of change for the novelistic genre, ending the necessity of family readership and resulting in the separation of the children's book from the adult novel. Henry James is not wholly to blame for this dissociation. Additionally, during the latter part of the Golden Age, the consequences of a World War which resulted in the real deaths of so many young men played a role in the estrangement of these two literary traditions, which had, at the start of the Golden Age, seemed to be coming together.

bring that language to maturity unless the work of his predecessors
has prepared it for his final touch. A mature literature, therefore,
has a history behind it: a history, that is not merely a chronicle, an
accumulation of manuscripts and writings of this kind and that, but
an ordered though unconscious progress of a language to realize its
own potentialities within its own limitations."[281]

Though I would argue that the literature for children written during the Golden Age has had

the most impact upon contemporary literature's renaissance, as I described in the previous

chapter, the role played by literature written during the twentieth century after the Golden

Age cannot be discounted. Though much of what was written for children after the First

World War until the 1990s can be characterized by its decided "childishness" and

determination to preserve the separateness of children and adults, the category has

progressed, however slowly, thanks to many of the literary luminaries that I mentioned in

the last chapter. Building upon the growth in thematic boldness that had been achieved by

realistic children's fiction in the past half-century as well as upon the radical young adult

fantasy literature that began to create shock waves in the 1960s, children's literature was

preparing to take this final step toward maturity. Now, contemporary children's literature,

like no other literature before it, has finally surpassed the arbitrary boundaries that have so

long surrounded it and realized its potential as literature that is as equivalently mature and

serious as adult literature. Thus, a century after Peter Pan declared that he would never do

so, children's literature, I believe, has finally grown up. J.K. Rowling, with her *Harry*

Potter series, has broken through the veil that has separated children's literature from that of

adults for the past hundred years. Though she is taking up the mantle of her Golden Age

predecessors, Rowling, like Barrie, does not simply repeat what has been done before, but

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[281] Eliot, *The Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, 117.

she, too, raises the stakes and revitalizes the tradition with her series. And Rowling is not

alone. To return to Eliot, he writes that a classic must incorporate not just the tradition of its

predecessors, but the innovation of its contemporaries:

> The persistence of literary creativeness in any people, accordingly,
> consists in the maintenance of an unconscious balance between
> tradition in the larger sense – the collective personality, so to
> speak, realized in the literature of the past – and the originality of
> the living generation.[282]

What is so interesting about this new age of literature is that so many of its texts

resemble each other in style, theme, and mission. Through intertextuality, Rowling and

other contemporary writers for children like Philip Pullman, Neil Gaiman, Catherynne

Valente, Diana Wynne Jones, Lemony Snicket, and Suzanne Collins are able to incorporate

landscapes, stories, and characters from a myriad of texts into their twenty-first century

fictions. Rowling and her contemporaries realize that the children's literature category's

very identity has been dependent upon this ability to circle back around itself and constantly

refer to prior works for children. However, while the majority of previous works for

children have referred to texts that were written within the category's own sphere (i.e. either

texts written expressly for children, or to texts written for a common audience, or even to

texts that critics have relocated to the children's literature category despite their original

reception as literature for adults), contemporary writers for children do not accept these

boundaries and instead plunder the texts of other, more "serious" fictions in addition to other

texts for children in order to expand the limits of the category. Indeed, Rowling may

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[282] Ibid., 119-120.

appropriate the school story and rework the wizardry of the fantasy genre, but these texts do not mark the limits of her reach. Instead, she and her contemporaries[283] escape the constraints of previous stories for children and create a new kind of literature by incorporating texts from two lineages: the children's book and the adult novel. Intertextuality remains crucial to the children's literature category, but now these new works pull from a more complex and diversified network of texts. In turn, this allows for a broader understanding of each text. In other words, because the network of texts invoked in the reading process is more complex, the codes through which meaning is filtered have also multiplied, which, in turn, permits the text to have deeper meanings. Additionally, because intertextuality is so fundamental, it is also ubiquitous. As Roland Barthes put it all texts are "a tissue of quotations," and these quotations pervade almost every aspect of the novels we are about to explore, from their settings, to their language, to the way they are narrated, and to the identity of their characters.[284] Therefore, when I discuss the way Rowling sets her scenes, I am also talking about intertextuality; when I explore the identity of contemporary child heroes in literature, I am also talking about intertextuality; when I examine the roots of Rowling's magical language, I am also talking about intertextuality. Everything leads back to this literary element because the category supports an intertextual view of its components:

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[283] It is important to note that not all contemporary writers of children's literature are following Rowling's lead. Because this is a new revolution and I am endeavoring to examine it as it is occurring, I would perhaps venture the number to be about a third of all Anglo-European fantasy writers for children today (although, again, as I detailed in the Introduction, I do believe this revolution to be occurring in children's picture books, realistic fiction, and young adult fiction), but the number is increasing exponentially every year.

[284] Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 148.

contemporary children's novels are the culmination and the apotheosis of multiple literary traditions.

Also, as I will illustrate in my conclusion, many if not all of the literary elements and devices employed and refined by Rowling are also utilized and reworked in the same way by her contemporaries. In this way, it is becoming increasingly evident that contemporary children's fiction is entering into a new classic phase. As opposed to the phase that occurs before or after a classic age, both of which exhibit eccentricity or monotony,[285] Eliot tells us that the development of a classic prose is possible to see when there is also a development towards what he calls a "*common style.*"[286] By this, he asserts that he does not mean "that the best writers are indistinguishable from each other. The essential and characteristic differences remain: it is not that the differences are less, but that they are more subtle and refined."[287] Thus, though each author creates a uniquely original story, their novels maintain the family resemblance that is crucial to children's literature. Whether it is the similarity of the dementors in *Harry Potter* to the spectres in *His Dark Materials*, or the resemblance of the Capital of Panem to the Ministry of Magic, the way in which Harry Potter or the mouse Despereaux comes to understand his role, or the manner by which Rowling creates the wizarding world and Valente structures Fairyland, contemporary children's fiction exhibits a commonality in its style.

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[285] Eliot, *The Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, 119. "The age following a classic age, may also exhibit eccentricity and monotony: monotony because the resources of the language have, for the time at least, been exhausted, and eccentricity because originality comes to be more valued than correctness. But the age in which we find a common style, will be an age when society has achieved a moment of order and stability, of equilibrium and harmony; as the age which manifests the greatest extremes of individual style will be an age of immaturity or an age of senility."

[286] Eliot, *The Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, 118.

[287] Ibid.

Finally, as I continue to explore the ways J. K. Rowling and her contemporaries have revolutionized the traditional characteristics of the category, it is important to remember that their works remain children's literature. While their defining markers and features have changed, as the new portraits of an old lineage exhibit the expansion of the family tree, they are still part of the children's literature tradition. But this tradition has now expanded so that it can include the complex forms, radical themes, sophisticated style, and seriousness of purpose that was once denied it. In this way, the category attains the level of high art that was once the sole province of adult literature. No more. Contemporary children's fiction has blown open another window in the house of fiction, has rent the veil of separation, and has taken up permanent residence.

Chapter Four
Say the Magic Word: Spellwork and the Legacy of Nonsense

In this chapter I demonstrate the way Rowling adopts and adapts literary nonsense in her Harry Potter series in order to both establish her works as part of the children's literature tradition and yet also align them with the adult novelistic tradition through the complex and sophisticated style of her spell language.

'When I use a word', Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less'.
'The question is', said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things'.
'The question is', said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master – that's all'.
-Lewis Carroll[288]

"Never used an Unforgivable Curse before, have you, boy?" she yelled. She had abandoned her baby voice now. "You need to *mean* them, Potter! You need to really want to cause pain – to enjoy it – righteous anger won't hurt me for long – I'll show you how it is done, shall I? I'll give you a lesson –"
-J. K. Rowling[289]

"Aesthetically, nonsense is the very breeding-ground of art."
-Wim Tigges[290]

Nearly one hundred and fifty years had passed since Edward Lear's *Nonsense Songs and Stories* when the resident sage of Hogwarts School puzzled his listeners and readers alike by announcing to his child audience: "Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak! Thank you!"[291] With this nonsensical speech, Rowling joins the long line of writers from 16th century John Redford (*Wit and Science* 1530s), to 17th century John

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[288] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 186.

[289] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 715.

[290] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (New York: Rodopi, 1988), 260.

[291] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 92.

Taylor (the Water-Poet), to 18th century Samuel Foote (*The Great Panjandrum* speech 1754), to (perhaps most famously) 19th century poet Edward Lear and novelist Lewis Carroll, to 20th century modernist James Joyce and post-modernist Spike Milligan, all who wrote in the mode of literary nonsense.   In fact, Dumbledore's welcoming speech at the Hogwarts feast may have been influenced by another nonsensical address, that of John Taylor's "To Tom Coriat":

> What matters for the place I first came from
> I am no Duncecomb, Coxecomb, Odcomb *Tom*
> Nor am I like a wool-pack, crammed with Greek,
> *Venus* in *Venice* minded to go seeke …[292]

Taylor was responding with "genial disrespect" to Thomas Coryate's *Crudities Hastily gobled up in five Moneths of travel…Newly digested in the hungry aire of Odcombe in the County of Somerset & now dispersed to the nourishment of the travelling Members of this Kingdom*, a work of travel literature, which, in the verses that comprised it, included some of the earliest forms of nonsense poetry.[293] As this verse infuriated Coryate, the amused Taylor published another pamphlet entitled *Laugh, and be Fat: or, a Commentary upon the Odcombyan Banket*, which mocked the prefatory verses of *Crudities*.[294] To return to the Hogwarts banquet, then, when a nervous and insecure eleven-year-old Harry Potter arrives at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and hears these first nonsensical words from Albus Dumbledore, if we look closer we realize that nonsense language might actually

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[292] Noel Malcolm, *The Origins of English Nonsense* (London: Fontana Press, 1998), 18.

[293] Ibid., 14-18.

[294] Ibid., 18.

make sense, or, at the very least, it might have a purpose: Dumbledore is genially

disrespecting the sober tradition of the Headmaster's first speech to his students by

encouraging them to laugh, enjoy the feast, and to not worry so much about their origins or

whether or not they are intelligent, skilled, or otherwise worthy enough to be at Hogwarts.

By the end of the series Harry learns to take Dumbledore's idiosyncratic turns of phrase like

"I open at the close"[295] seriously, however nonsensical they may at first seem. This

attention comes, I think, not only from Harry's respect and trust for Dumbledore's wisdom

and goodness, but also from Harry's growing respect and belief in language as a powerful

tool. Dumbledore, as well as Harry's other mentors throughout the series, teach Harry that

during the process of becoming a wizard, stringing words together can be both a delightful

but also a serious business. In this way, by privileging language play, *Harry Potter* aligns

itself not only with John Taylor's *Laugh and be Fat*, but also the works of such writers as

Shakespeare, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Edward Gorey, Flann O'Brien, Franz Kafka,

Jorge Luis Borges, and Italo Calvino.

However, that the *Harry Potter* series belongs to this prestigious lineage may still

come as a surprise, because – in large part due to the popularity of Lewis Carroll's *Alice*

books – literary nonsense has long been most closely associated with the children's literature

category. Indeed, in his book, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, scholar Wim Tigges,

perhaps unsurprisingly, employs Carroll and Lear as the standard by which to measure the

nonsense genre. Tigges establishes a binary typology of nonsense, though he later states

that a balance between the two extremes is best. On the one hand there is what he terms a

"rational" or "ornamental" type of nonsense. In this type, which allies itself to wit, Tigges

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[295] The inscription on the Golden Snitch, which hides the second Hallow, the Resurrection Stone.

tells us that "there is usually an initial absurd proposition which is then logically followed to its conclusion, and in which play with language, often incorporated within an argumentative conversation, plays a major role."[296] The second type, which allies itself to humor, is "irrational" or "poetical," which in the view of many is purer nonsense.[297] This kind of nonsense, Tigges writes, "goes back to a 'popular' type of nonsense in which sound-patterns and extravagant images are more dominant."[298] Each Victorian author represents one side of the binary: Carroll is the "rational," Lear is the "irrational." From their works, Tigges creates his anatomy of nonsense:

> …it is almost generally acknowledged that whatever nonsense is, specific works by Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll belong to its canon. Working on the assumption that Lear's "Complete Nonsense" as well as Carroll's Alice books and *The Hunting of the Snark* are nonsense texts in their own right, it should be possible to discover what these works have in common, and thus to arrive at a set of characteristics of literary nonsense, which can then be traced in other works as well.[299]

Attracted to nonsense for both personal and perhaps political reasons[300], Carroll and Lear, who incorporated nonsense devices like non sequiturs, parallelisms, parodies, lexical exhibitionism, neologisms, puzzles, codes, incongruity, and portmanteau words into their novels and poems, were seen to conspire with the child in an effort to expose the illogical, bewildering, and at times ridiculous rules imposed by adult society. Additionally, children's

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[296] Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, 256.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Ibid.

[299] Ibid., 3.

[300] See Reynolds (2009); Carpenter (1985)

literature scholar Kimberly Reynolds tells us that during the latter part of the nineteenth

century, nonsense stood against positivism, or, in other words, represented a rejection of the

desire to reduce all aspects of life down to knowable quantities:

> Nineteenth-century nonsense can be seen as a response to the
> overconfident, highly rigid systems of education and morality, and
> the obsession with collecting, classifying, and so spuriously
> claiming possession over information about the world, past and
> present, which dominated most of the nineteenth century.[301]

This idea that nonsense literature renounces 'certainties' and, in so doing, inspires aesthetic

innovation and creative experimentation is thoroughly examined by Juliet Dusinberre in her

book *Alice to the Lighthouse*. Reynolds, in response and in accord with Dusinberre, also

masterfully addresses the way nonsense literature makes aesthetic and intellectual demands

on child readers in her book *Radical Children's Literature.* Reynolds closes her chapter on

nonsense by saying:

> Nonsense is supremely good at making such demands, which is
> why, no matter how it is utilised in fiction for adults, it needs to be
> retained in the domain of children's literature where it can move
> on the thinking of future generations.[302]

While I agree with Dusinberre's argument that Learian and Carrollian nonsense

inspired aesthetic creativity and thus impacted modernist adult literature as well as with

Reynolds's assertion that nonsense is crucial to the future of children's literature, what

interests me more is her claim that nonsense was not solely created for the province of

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[301] Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature*, 55.

[302] Ibid., 67.

childhood. In part because the most successful writers of nonsense literature wrote for

children and employed poems and rhymes for children in their works, there is a common

assumption that we can draw a straight line from oral tales and nursery rhymes to Victorian

nonsense poems and novels. However, as scholars like Kimberley Reynolds and Noel

Malcolm explain, literary nonsense instead finds its earliest roots in literature for adults.

Indeed, Reynolds writes:

> …in fact, literary nonsense derives from highly specialized
> discourses in high culture. For instance, many of the early
> examples of nonsense were created to be performed at the Inns of
> Court and consist of parodies of the kinds of rhetorical and courtly
> skills on which the legal profession depended and in which its
> practitioners needed to excel. The pleasures of this kind of
> nonsense derive from knowing languages, arguments, rhetorical
> styles, and professional information available only to an educated
> elite. It is not, then, a carnavalised folk-based literature in which
> all readers can participate, but a self-conscious, insider humour.[303]

So we find that nonsense has a double heritage: on the one hand, nonsense was first written

for an elite, sophisticated audience from which children were denied access, while on the

other hand, nonsense also found a place in oral sources like folk tales and nursery rhymes,

and, later, in children's novels. It is interesting, then, that despite the high degree of

"technical knowledge" and "intellectual sophistication" that Reynolds indicates are required

for the effects of nonsense to be understood, this literary mode found its home since the

Victorian era in a category dismissed by most nineteenth and twentieth century critics as

"low culture."[304] Indeed, even Lear and Carroll themselves made an effort to trivialize their

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[303] Ibid., 46.

[304] Ibid., 47.

nonsense literature, suggesting that its creation was just an inconsequential way to pass the time or to procrastinate on more serious matters. Carroll's introductory poem to *Alice in Wonderland* makes it clear that the nonsense in the *Alice* stories was particularly requested by a child listener ("*There will be nonsense in it!*") and though Lear is now best known for his nonsense verses and drawings, at the time of publication, he used the term to suggest that they were of less value than his more serious and critically acclaimed paintings and poems.[305]

And yet, despite Carroll's and Lear's reluctance to draw attention to the complexity and significance of their works, Wim Tigges also affirms that the creation of nonsense requires immense technical skill and a meticulous attention to opposing forces. He writes that the essence of nonsense is that it:

> …maintains a perfect tension between meaning and absence of meaning. Such a balance cannot be successfully maintained if a text appears to be meaningless from the very start. In suggesting an initial meaning, the most successful nonsense texts set up a playful framework of themes and motifs which appeal to the reader's imagination, to his sense of language, as well as to his knowledge and appreciation of literary conventions of form and theme, plot and character. The success, and then the intrinsic interest of nonsense depends on the creativity and intelligence with which these elements are presented. That it appeals to children does not automatically entitle us to relegate it to an inferior category of literature labelled "juvenile" or "trivial". Its assumed simplicity is as often deceptive as that of much modern abstract art. It is often easier to fill a space than to leave it empty.[306]

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[305] Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, 5.

[306] Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense,* 4-5.

I quote Tigges in full here because I find it troubling that while he passionately affirms that the intelligent and creative children's fictions written by Carroll and Lear are the defining markers of nonsense, Tigges would rather create an entirely new category (which he calls *generic nonsense*) than include nonsense as part of the children's literature category. Obviously, I think this a bit paranoid (and, frankly, a bit insulting) but, nevertheless, his hesitation is perhaps understandable: Tigges wants his readers to realize that nonsense literature has an aesthetic philosophy, that it is, indeed, sophisticated and complex. Consequently, because children's literature has never been considered to be "high art," he does not want nonsense literature to be *ipso facto* disqualified from achieving this status. Tigges's solution is therefore to carefully carve out a separate genre for nonsense literature and, what is more, he is very selective when it comes to whom he names as Carroll's and Lear's successors. In fact, there are very few writers of children's literature who make the cut. Of the many writers whose work Tigges surveys (Christian Morgenstern, Edward Gorey, Flann O'Brien, Mervyn Peake, Alfred Jarry, Carl Sandberg, Richard Hughes, John Lennon, the Marx Brothers, Stefan Thermeson, Anthony Burgess, Peter Bischel, and Russell Hoban) most wrote nonsense primarily for adults, often, as is the case with Peter Bischel and Edward Gorey, in the style of a children's book but intended for mature readers.[307] This is not to say that the nonsense mode was never employed in other works for children that do not qualify as generic nonsense (because they privilege something else—style, story, character, etc.—before they privilege nonsense), but even when Tigges does address

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[307] By creating a separate category for generic nonsense, Tigges perhaps reveals that literary nonsense could not find a permanent place in the children's literature category since the Victorian era, which implies that I am correct in my assumptions (Chapter 2) that children's literature has experienced a dearth of innovation and a lull in experimentation after the Golden Age.

"borderline" cases, he almost exclusively addresses writers that intended for their work to be received by an adult audience, namely Gertrude Stein, Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, and Italo Calvino. In this way, whether inadvertently or purposefully, Tigges implies that literary nonsense in children's literature has not been as complex or revolutionary as it has been in adult literature, nor has it displayed an aesthetic philosophy since the Victorian era.

But I believe that there is hope for nonsense as a device in contemporary children's literature because Rowling, followed by many of her contemporaries like Catherynne Valente, Lemony Snicket, and Trenton Lee Stewart capitalize on literary nonsense's heritage in a new way. While Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is assuredly not a purely nonsense text (because, if we agree with Tigges's definition, the nonsense in *Harry Potter* is not so much generic as it is a mode or device and it is employed as an element of style rather than determining the generic nature of the work), it does often privilege language in the same way as a purely nonsense text. As I will describe in the next pages, while Rowling retains many of the so-called "childish" characteristics of Carrollian and Learian nonsense—its playful puzzles, codes, and improbabilities, its allusions to fantastic creatures, its child-oriented vision, etc.—her nonsense also incorporates the tension between meaning and its absence, and, often, her fictional reality is created by a kind of language play that is similar to that of these two Victorian men. Finally, I ultimately argue that Rowling revolutionizes the nonsense mode in children's literature by employing nonsense language not only in order to create an effective and aesthetically pleasing reality, but also as a device to examine the tension that exists between the interior self and external action. In this way, Rowling's nonsense displays a simultaneous commitment to a sophisticated aesthetic philosophy that

recalls nonsense's most acclaimed literary antecedents as well as its distinguished legacy in

adult literature.

Section 1: Worldly Nonsense

Like Carroll and Lear before her, Rowling employs the nonsense mode to resist the

grip of convention, but also to express a particular sense of playful and delightfully

unpredictable reality[308] within her novels. From the first pages, the reader is plunged into a

universe in which objects like a "deluminator[309]", transportation systems like the Floo

Network and Knight Bus, and rumormongers like an Animagus beetle[310] exist alongside the

"normal" world's ordinary torches, London Underground and Night Buses, and electronic

bugging. Rowling crossbreeds signifiers and purposefully pluralizes denotations in order to

create a reality that is at once familiar, yet wholly unique. Indeed, the wizarding world is

overrun with anagrams, puns, portmanteau words, symbolic names, incongruities, etc., many

of which indicate the simultaneous realism and fantasy that these novels inherited from

Carrollian and Learian nonsense. When we come across these whimsical magical

alternatives in Rowling's text, we recall Alice's encounters with flamingo croquet sticks and

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[308] This unpredictability is especially the case in the first three novels, when Harry is plunged into the wizarding world and must acclimate himself to what might as well be an alternate universe. As he becomes accustomed to life as a wizard, he becomes less and less surprised by its unique idiosyncrasies. This differs from Alice's journey through Wonderland because though she navigates her way through the alternate world, she never becomes accustomed to it. Though, of course, Alice's journey occurred in one afternoon, while Harry's spans more than seven years.

[309] A unique magical object, of Dumbledore's invention, which is capable of absorbing any and all light from the user's surroundings as well as bestowing it. Additionally, it acts as a sort of homing device, leading the possessor via a light through his/her heart to his/her most treasured people. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," is the epitaph Dumbledore selected for the graves of his mother and sister, which perhaps inspired the idea behind this object.

[310] Rita Skeeter is both a rumormonger reporter and an unreported beetle Animagus.

run-ins with playing cards employed as guardsmen. For example, in *Deathly Hallows*,

newly planted flutterby bushes (an anagram for butterfly) dot the garden of the Burrow (the

Weasley's home) before the wedding of Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour. The garden

gnomes, who usually occupy the space, Harry tells us, have been banished elsewhere. Here,

not only are the flutterby bushes a play on butterfly bushes (they actually resemble

butterflies perched on shrubbery), but the gnomes are not the "funny" statues found in

Muggle gardens, but an actual species of gnome, the Gernumbli gardensi (as identified by

Xenophilius Lovegood). Indeed, even the name of the Weasley's home, The Burrow, is

itself a pun: the ramshackle house has been magically modified so that the structure can bear

the load of the numerous additions required to house all of the Weasley family (Mr. Arthur,

Mrs. Molly, Bill, Charlie, Percy, Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny Weasley) resulting in a

home that resembles the brick and mortar equivalent of an actual weasel's burrow.

Rowling also creates magical alternatives to many Muggle devices like airplanes,

subway systems, video cameras, and security alarms and in this way, she appeals to the

imagination through language play. For example, many of the portmanteau words that

pepper the novels are often the designators of magical objects that replace their real or

Muggle equivalent. A sneakoscope (a play on the word telescope and a portmanteau of

'sneak' and 'scope'), for example, replaces a security alarm, surveying the area and buzzing

loudly when an untrustworthy person is near. In Book Four a magical device called a

"portkey" plays an important role both at the beginning of the novel and at its conclusion.

The word "portkey" indicates a derivation from the French word for door, "port," as well as

the words "portal" and "portable." As portkeys are (usually) mundane, portable objects that

function as keys that open portal-like openings in space (recalling, in this way, Madeleine

L'Engle's "tesseract") through which wizards can travel from place to place, the multiple

meanings of Rowling's manufactured portmanteau word become readily apparent[311].

Similarly, particularly in the last four books of the series, an object owned by Dumbledore

called the Pensieve provides Harry with crucial information about the past that will affect

his present and future. Again, Rowling crossbreeds two ordinary words to create a

powerfully magical object: the first is "pensive," meaning engaged in, involving, or

reflecting deep and serious thought; the second is "sieve," a utensil used to strain liquids

from solids or separate coarser from finer particles. Dumbledore's Pensieve is a stone,

shaped like a bowl, in which swirls of memory, neither liquid nor gas, are able to be

isolated, retrieved, and examined by the person or persons who penetrate (usually by

plunging their head(s) into) the bowl. The Pensieve, Dumbledore tells us, offers a way to

unburden the mind and examine one's own or another's memories either in isolation or

through comparative analysis. Here, the very act of using the Pensieve is a play on the

expression "to read someone's thoughts."

Section 2: Bits, Bobs, and Beasts

Bits:

Like Carroll's "Jabberwocky" poem and *The Hunting of the Snark,* whose plots and

creatures derive inspiration from knightly derring-do, heroic quests, and mythological or

legendary creatures, Rowling's nonsense objects, characters, and creatures also at times

recall fairy tales, myths, and legends that continue to permeate contemporary texts for

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[311] Additionally, the spell to make a portkey, "Portus," suggests the imperative "Take us."

children. In this way, Rowling circles back to the earliest texts that belong to the tradition of common readership and reworks them to create something new.

The *Mirror of Erised*, for example, is one of the first dangerous magical objects with which Harry come into contact. Using his father's invisibility cloak to explore Hogwarts castle at night, Harry stumbles into a deserted room, empty except for a mirror on whose frame is inscribed: "Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi."[312] Though initially this inscription resembles the nonsense language Carroll created in "Jabberwocky," when reflected in a mirror with the separations rearranged, Rowling's nonsense words spell out "I show not your face but your heart's desire." Here, then, Rowling displays the tension between meaning and meaninglessness that mirrors Harry's confusion as to what is dream and what is reality. Harry, who sees his deceased parents and extended family reflected back at him, soon begins to think of nothing but his nightly vigils in front of the mirror. He becomes listless and apathetic during the day, consumed by his longing for the people he sees in the mirror, but whom he can never truly join. He is impatient with his friend Ron, first fighting with Ron when he lingers in front of the mirror because Ron's experience with the mirror delays his own. He then ignores Ron's wishes when Ron, noticing Harry's preoccupation, begs him not to return to the room at night as he believes the mirror is negatively affecting Harry's health and happiness. Rowling's Erised anagram thus recalls not only the mirror in Snow White that reveals her stepmother's obsessive desire for beauty, which, in turn, inspired her murderous hatred for the more beautiful Snow White, but also the sad fate of the mythological character Narcissus, whose all-consuming desire for what he saw reflected in still water caused his death. Dumbledore further suggests this connection as

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[312] Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 152.

he warns Harry of his unhealthy attraction to the mirror: "It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that."[313]

Additionally, Rowling plays with impossibilities by making the mirror a vehicle through which to bestow another magical object, the Philosopher's Stone. Here again Rowling fuses together the legendary with the fantastic because in the "real" past, the creation of the Philosopher's Stone was the most sought-after goal in Western alchemy. The stone itself is yet another nonsense object because its existence is based upon an impossibility, namely, the science of alchemy. The Philosopher's Stone was said to turn base metals into gold or silver as well as to function as an elixir of life. Here, Rowling incorporates the real history of the stone into her fictional reality, taking something impossible and making it possible. The maker of the Philosopher's Stone in Book 1 is identified as Nicolas Flamel, who, in Rowling's universe is a highly skilled wizard, but who in reality was a successful French scribe and manuscript-seller as well as a rumored alchemist during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. In this way, the two worlds collide in Flamel and his identity becomes a possible impossibility. Ironically, as in Rowling's book, Flamel actually did marry a woman named Perenelle in 1368, whose name, of course, suggests "perennial."

At the climax of the novel, in the chapter "The Man with Two Faces," both the mirror and Harry's knowledge of how it works become crucial to the plot. Incidentally, here Rowling again plays with multiple meanings as "The Man with Two Faces" can allude to Professor Quirrell whose body is being inhabited by Lord Voldemort and thus has another face behind his own; it can also allude to the fact that Quirrell is two-faced because he

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[313] Ibid., 157.

pretends to be one thing but is really another; or it can mean a reflection, the second face one sees in a mirror. In this chapter, the mirror is the last obstacle preventing Lord Voldemort from stealing the Philosopher's Stone, which will provide him with eternal life. Quirrell, who gazes into the mirror in order to take the stone for Voldemort, is unaware of how the mirror operates: "I see the stone … I'm presenting it to my master …but where is it?"[314] When Voldemort commands Quirrell to use Harry as a means of taking the stone, Harry looks into the mirror and lies about what he sees: "'I see myself shaking hands with Dumbledore,' he invented. 'I – I've won the House Cup for Gryffindor.'"[315] In reality, Harry sees:

> his reflection, pale and scared-looking at first. But a moment later, the reflection smiled at him. It put its hand into its pocket and pulled out a blood-red stone. It winked and put the Stone back into its pocket – and as it did so, Harry felt something heavy drop into his real pocket. Somehow – incredibly – *he'd got the Stone*.[316]

Here, the tension between reality and unreality is momentarily suspended as Harry and his mirror-self collide, bringing an object from non-being into being. Not only do we remember the magical appearance of the cake, bottle, and key in *Alice in Wonderland*, but this moment summons similar images in previous fairy tale texts like Rumpelstiltskin, Cinderella, and The Emperor's New Clothes, where characters conjure something out of nothing.

Additionally, throughout the series, we learn that Rowling sometimes employs the nonsense mode in order to connect episodes from the earlier *Harry Potter* novels with

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[314] Ibid., 210.

[315] Ibid., 212.

[316] Ibid.

situations that occur later in the series. As a result, the "rules" of magic become apparent to

the reader. For example, in another nonsensical moment in *Deathly Hallows*, Professor

McGonagall answers a question posed by the Ravenclaw doorknocker:

> There was a genteel tap of the knocker and the musical voice
> asked, again, 'Where do vanished objects go?'
> 'Into non-being, which is to say, everything,' replied Professor
> McGonagall.
> 'Nicely phrased[317],' replied the eagle doorknocker and the door
> swung open.[318]

In this scene, the reader is reminded of the earlier moment when a magical object (the

mirror) interacted with a character (Harry) and produced a moment of tension between

meaning and its absence. Because we first witnessed the way the stone appeared in Harry's

pocket out of nowhere, and because we also know Dumbledore enchanted the mirror, we

realize that Dumbledore must have vanished the stone into non-being, meaning that it was in

everything, thus making it possible for the mirror to act as a vehicle for its reappearance. As

a result, this moment with Professor McGonagall, which again operates in the nonsense

mode, reveals the deeply layered fictional reality that Rowling has created through words.

Bobs:

Character names in *Harry Potter* also reveal nonsense's legacy in contemporary

fiction for children. Critics of Rowling and children's literature (and, for that matter, "non-

serious" adult literature, like the works of Charles Dickens) often reference children's

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[317] Additionally, the doorknocker's response "nicely phrased" demonstrates the privileging of
language that occurs when operating in the nonsense mode (McGonagall is successful in opening the
magical door because she correctly employed the right words).

[318] J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 476.

writers' use of symbolism when naming characters in order to conclude that their novels are decidedly childish, especially when compared to the "realism" of serious adult novels in which, like a rose, a name is just a name. However, while I believe that Rowling's and other contemporary children's writers' use of symbolic appellations is a conscious choice to indeed ally their novels with the children's literature tradition, I do not think that this makes their novels childish or simplistic. Rather, by choosing symbolic names for their characters, contemporary children's writers create codes that the reader must decipher in order to discover the selfhood or identity of each character, a practice which challenges the reader's knowledge of literary history and etymology.

Rowling's name symbolism is both expansive and comprehensive. Indeed, almost every magical character name incorporates some clue to his or her selfhood. Notable examples are Lucius Malfoy, whose first name suggests Lucifer and whose surname is a portmanteau word from the French *mal* (bad) and *foi* (faith). As Lucius Malfoy is one of Voldemort's inner circle, his name's alliance with evil comes at no surprise. However, additionally, with Lucius's allegorical surname, Rowling, like Spenser before her, gives us a clue as to Lucius's character and fate: Malfoy almost always acts in "bad faith," abusing his servants, manipulating government officials in order to pursue his own ends, persecuting Muggleborns, and even at times bullying his own family. But his name also suggests that Lucius puts his faith in the wrong people. As we learn in the novel, Lucius falls from Voldemort's favor when he fails both to collect the prophesy at the Ministry of Magic and capture Harry Potter, and is consequently severely punished by Voldemort who gives Lucius's son, Draco, what is essentially a suicide mission as revenge for his father's failure. In turn, Draco Malfoy, whose first name is derived from the Latin "draco," and which also

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refers to the constellation, does indeed believe he is the star of his family when Voldemort

selects him to kill Albus Dumbledore. He, too, consistently acts in bad faith, from his

attempt to get Harry expelled by standing him up for a duel in *Philosopher's Stone* to his

actions in the Room of Requirement in *Deathly Hallows*, and like his father Draco, too, puts

his faith in the wrong people. Finally, Draco's mother's name, Narcissa, suggests

narcissism and her pale coloring emphasizes her relationship to the drowned Narcissus.

Other peripheral characters also have symbolic names which reveal both their roles in the

plot as well as their natures. The Hogwarts caretaker, Argus Filch's first name recalls the

mythological giant with one hundred eyes and, indeed, Mr. Filch always has an eye on the

students and filches contraband items from them. His cat (or kneazle), Mrs. Norris, who

spies on the students and reports their actions back to her master, refers to the officious Mrs.

Norris in *Mansfield Park* who takes every opportunity to complain and interfere.

Grindelwald, the Dark wizard defeated by Dumbledore in 1945, recalls the monster defeated

in *Beowulf,* Grindell, as well as the Battle of Grunwald, in which the Germans invaded

Poland. Xenophilius Lovegood's name suggests that he has a love of the strange and of the

good, which is demonstrated by his unorthodox magazine, *The Quibbler*, the only

publication which sided with Harry during the Second Wizarding War. Though there are

hundreds more, I would now like to examine two characters who, in particular, demonstrate

the complexity and sophistication of Rowling's symbolic names.

One of the most central adult characters in the novels is Remus Lupin, Defense

Against the Dark Arts professor, one of the four Marauders (Moony) and, as Harry discovers

at the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, a werewolf. Lupin's identity is kept secret by the

Hogwarts staff as werewolves are outcasts in wizard society, considered to be highly

dangerous and even, in a sense, contagious because they can create other werewolves if they bite a victim at the full moon. The etymology of his surname is a clue to his alter ego as a werewolf as "Lupin" is derived from the Latin word "lupinus" or "wolf-like," "lupus" or "wolf" being the root word. However, the extent to which the reader grasps Lupin's selfhood is dependent upon the reader's knowledge of literary history. His first name, "Remus" acts as another clue to Lupin's identity, alluding to the two legendary brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were suckled by a female wolf. Lupin's character as well as his fate reveals itself in his name if we know that Romulus's and Remus's father, Mars, was the god of war and that his two sons fought to the death in order to determine who would control Rome. The ongoing battle that occurs between the two sides of Lupin's personality is brought to the reader's immediate attention in *Prisoner of Azkaban* when Lupin forgets to take the potion that renders him innocuous when he changes into a werewolf at the full moon. But Rowling complicates Lupin's story still further by choosing to name her character after the brother who did *not* live to found Rome. In this way, Rowling foreshadows Remus's fate as a character who dies before the victorious end of the Second Wizarding War. When Lupin chooses "Romulus" as his code name on Potterwatch in *Deathly Hallows*, to the informed reader, this indicates that Remus's death is near at hand as it was only when he killed his brother that Romulus took control of the city and named it in his own honor.

The second character is the most deadly in the series, Tom Marvolo Riddle or Lord Voldemort. Voldemort's birth surname is itself the term for a word puzzle and immediately indicates to us that his identity will remain an enigma throughout the series. And, indeed, it is only in Book 2 that Harry realizes that Tom Riddle and Voldemort are the same person

when the Horcrux Tom Riddle rearranges his name: TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE becomes I AM LORD VOLDEMORT. Additionally, despite Dumbledore's collection of memories, much of Voldemort's life remains a mystery to all but himself. Tom is the diminutive of the name Thomas, meaning *legend* and the 'volo' in Marvolo might come from the Latin root meaning 'I wish,' but it also means 'to fly, or move rapidly.' Marvolo also implies 'marvelous,' thus these various roots could indicate that, when taken together, a wish for marvelous or legendary things to occur rapidly, an appropriate wish for a wizard who desired both notoriety and immortality from a very young age. Marvolo could also be derived from Malvolio, a character in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* who is "sick with self-love." But the name 'Voldemort' is the most telling indicator of the Dark Lord's identity, especially as he chose it for himself by making an anagram of his birth name. The 'mort' could be derived from 'mors' or 'mortum,' the Latin word for death. 'Vol' could also find its roots in the Latin 'volere,' meaning 'will' or 'desire,' or it could come from the French word 'vol' which has two meanings, 'flight' and 'theft.' Taken with the French word 'de' meaning 'of' or 'from,' 'Voldemort' indicates both his flight from death and his theft from death: he both avoids death and cheats death by creating his Horcruxes. Other possible roots include the Arabic word 'demurht' which means, literally, 'wizard.' In each instance, we find an indication of Voldemort's inherent self.

Beasts:

Finally, the most Wonderlandish and Learian example of nonsense can perhaps be found by examining the magical creatures who inhabit the wizarding world. Like Alice who encounters Cheshire cats, dodo birds, mock turtles, dormice, and March hares through her increasingly nonsensical journey, as part of her meticulous attention to the details of Harry's

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indoctrination into the wizarding world, Rowling created a textbook for the students at

Hogwarts entitled *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, written by the magizoologist,

Newton Artemis Fido "Newt" Scamander (b. 1897). This book, which is mentioned

throughout the series, is employed both in the classroom (primarily for "Care of Magical

Creatures" classes) and out, as Dumbledore explains in his "Foreword" to current edition:

> "No wizarding household is complete without a copy of *Fantastic
> Beasts*, well thumbed by the generations who have riffled its pages
> in search of the best way to rid the law of Horklumps, interpret the
> mournful cries of the Augurey, or cure their pet Puffskein of
> drinking out of the toilet."[319]

Not only does Rowling play with Scamander's name—Scamander is a pun on salamander;

Newton recalls Sir Isaac Newton, the physicist and mathematician known in his own day as

a natural philosopher; Artemis refers to the goddess of the hunt, whom Homer called

Artemis Agrotera, Potnia Theron (Artemis of the wildland, Mistress of Animals); Fido

humorously suggests a name commonly used for dogs—but his identity is also a whimsical

homage to early zoologists. His personal history resembles that of two real zoologists:

Prussian geographer, zoologist, naturalist, and explorer Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich

Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), who traveled extensively throughout the world,

describing it for the first time from a modern scientific point of view and whose 5-volume

work *Kosmos* attempted to unify various branches of scientific knowledge, as well as his

friend Achille Valeciennes (1794-1865), a zoologist and parisitologist who was tasked with

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[319] J.K. Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, (New York: Scholastic,
2001), vii.

classifying the animals Humboldt described during his travels. Scamander's book abounds

with Snark and Jabberwocky-type creatures, which indicates that the wizarding world has a

complete if bizarre zoology that exists in secret alongside the creatures of the Muggle

world.[320] Mythological creatures like centaurs, sphinx, basilisks, fairies, unicorns,

merpeople, dragons, griffins, and chimaeras exist in Rowling's universe, but the true word

play occurs with her original creatures. For example, the Acromantula, a species of giant

spider that was created by wizards before the 1965 Ban on Experimental Breeding. The

etymology of this fictional creature's name comes from the Greek "acros," meaning "peak"

or "high point" as well as suggesting "arachnid" and "tarantula." Beasts identified as

Erumpents are native to Africa and resemble the rhinoceros in their size, coloring, thick

hides, and sharp horns. "Erumpent" suggests elephant, trumpet, and, indeed, erumpet—to

grow or burst through a surface. Humorously, Rowling's erumpent horns contain a deadly

fluid which cause whatever is injected with it to explode. With the erumpent horn that

appears in the seventh novel, Rowling even indicates that it is possible for wizards to believe

in legendary or imaginary creatures. Xenophilius Lovegood lamentably mistakes an

erumpent horn as that of a Crumple-Horned Snorkack, a creature who is most definitely an

homage to Carroll's Snark. Xenophilius and his daughter Luna spend their holidays

"hunting" the Snorkack, who, like the snark, is very difficult to find and capture.

Section 3: Doubles, Riddles, and Meaningful Clues

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[320] There is also, of course, a complete magical botany, which Harry encounters in his Herbology
classes.

In addition to providing her readers with hints as to her character's inner lives through their symbolic names, Rowling also plays with double-meanings in her chapter headings. For example, in *Order of the Phoenix*, the chapter "Seen and Unforeseen" refers to the predicted sacking of Divination Professor Trelawney and her unexpected replacement, but also to the visions Harry is seeing in his dreams that will lead him into an unforeseen trap at the Ministry of Magic. The second chapter of *Half-Blood Prince*, "Will and Won't," alludes to Sirius Black's last will and testament, to the clash of wills that occurs between Dumbledore and the Dursleys, and then to yet another clash between Harry and Kreacher the house elf. The chapter entitled "An Excess of Phlegm" is also a play on words and hints at the preoccupations of the characters in the chapter. "Phlegm" is Ginny Weasley's nickname for Fleur Delacour, whose French name requires the speaker to use the back of the throat in order to pronounce it correctly, and whose character Ginny and the other women find excessively annoying in this chapter. But 'phlegm' also refers to the medical condition "excessive phlegm creation" which occurs from misuse or overuse of the voice, which is fitting for this chapter in which Harry spends the majority of the time yelling (causing many of his online fans to call him CAPS-LOCK Harry for this part of the book). Additionally, 'phlegm' refers back to one of the four elemental bodily humours of medieval physiology regarded as causing sluggishness or apathy. In this chapter, Harry is not only sluggish, awakening very late in the morning, but he also assumes the apathetic stance characteristic of many teenagers in regard to his situation in life.

But while many of the chapter headings are merely humorous or descriptive, sometimes these titles act as clues to the puzzles and codes Rowling has hidden throughout her series, and often the headings themselves often have double-meanings or act as riddles.

In this way, Rowling permits an elastic and adaptable text because the meaning of the chapter headings can change according to the reader's assumptions and suspicions about the story. For example, in *Chamber of Secrets*, Chapter Nine, "The Writing on the Wall" indicates the actual writing ("THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED ENEMIES OF THE HEIR BEWARE") on the wall that occurs in the chapter, but also alludes to the idiomatic expression, hinting that, from this point in the series, we should be aware that these events indicate Voldemort's return to power. The ingenious foreshadowing that occurs through this seemingly simple chapter heading pun only becomes fully apparent in Book 6 when Dumbledore reveals that the diary used to unlock the Chamber of Secrets was in fact Voldemort's second Horcrux. Additionally, we don't realize that in *Goblet of Fire*, Chapter 28, "The Madness of Mr. Crouch" is even a pun until Chapter Thirty-Five, "Veritaserum," when we learn the identity of "the impostor," assuming that "madness" indicates Mr. Bartemius Crouch, Sr.'s physical condition when he speaks to Harry and Victor Krum in the Forbidden Forest. It is only later that we realize "madness" is also is a clue as to the true identity of the man (Bartemius Crouch, Jr.) whom Harry believes to be Mad-Eye Moody. In this way, by embedding word puzzles and meaningful clues into her chapter headings, Rowling implicates her reader in the creation of the story. Thus, she moves beyond simply playing games with her child readers and instead raises the stakes by allowing them a role in the act of meaning-making.

Section 4: Curiouser and Curiouser

Rowling is thus indebted to the legacy of nonsense literature in the creation of her fantastically inventive fictional reality. Her playful names, wonderfully outlandish yet

familiar creatures, and mysterious clues draw upon this literary tradition, but at the same time, Rowling manipulates the nonsense mode in a new way to promote a more complex understanding of her magical universe that we do not have of Wonderland. What I will demonstrate in the next few pages is the second way in which the legacy of literary nonsense is employed in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Rowling infamously created a spell language for her wizarding world, and in so doing she allies herself with yet another tradition of literary nonsense: the invention of language. This form of literary nonsense dates as far back as even the fifteenth century, when as Noel Malcolm tells us:

> Various types of trans-linguistic foolery were part of the heritage of European literature. The more elaborate kinds, naturally, were developed in circumstances where linguistic self-consciousness was at a premium: in schools and universities where Latin was taught (and spoken), and in courtly literary circles where the command of more than one modern language was expected."[321]

Malcolm tells us that during this time in history, there existed a tradition called macaronics (commonly called 'dog-Latin' or 'kitchen-Latin') in which a Latin surface layer is added to a vernacular substratum to produce a comic effect.[322] And it is from this vein, he continues, that Rabelais drew his own highly fantastic word-coinages, such as 'désincornifistibulé.' The basic strategy of macaronics—to exploit our assumption that the more Latinate and formal-looking a word is, the more rationally abstract its meaning—is the same for such neologisms. Rowling's spell language employs Latin in a similar way as far as our assumptions about its complexity based on its Latinate appearance, but, for the most part,

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[321] Malcolm, *The Origins of English Nonsense*, 103.

[322] Ibid., 103-104.

she does not intend for the same comic effect.[323] Instead, Rowling's spell language is

privileged above the vernacular, much in the same way that modernist nonsense poetry and

prose reveals serious concern beneath the nonsense motifs, as in the works of Franz Kafka,

Louis Zukofsky, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. For these writers,

Tigges tells us that the nonsense language has an undeniable point.[324] For example, in

Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Kafka employs the important nonsense procedure that Tigges calls

"Play with Boundaries," but ultimately the nonsense of Gregor Mendel-as-cockroach serves

to underline the sad condition of man-as-bug.[325] Similarly, as in these adult literary works,

we will see that the nonsense language in Rowling's novels serves to evoke connotations

rather than evade them.[326] For example, in the case of a Beckett play such as "Waiting for

Godot," Tigges writes that "the diction is too associative to be ultimately nonsensical."[327]

In Rowling's world, her spell language has an underlying meaning that is illuminated

both by the breakdown of the neologism as well as by the manifestation of the spell-word's

intention in reality. In this way, as I will describe in the remainder of this chapter, she

creates a new kind of nonsense device which serves not only to delight but also to instruct,

and through which we come to a greater understanding of her characters. In particular, spell

language, which I will refer to as 'spellwork,' operates as an important tool in Harry Potter

as means to examine her protagonist's education and moral development. Spellwork, I

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[323] Except in the case of shoddy spell work or mistakes, as I will explain in the next couple of pages.

[324] Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, 218-219.

[325] Ibid., 219.

[326] Ibid., 218.

[327] Ibid., 219.

argue, is employed by Rowling to demonstrate the relationship and tension between the interior self and external action. This examination will also ultimately explain how this (literal) language of enchantment becomes crucial to Harry's success in saving himself and the other wizards, witches, creatures, and even Muggles that make up his fictional universe. In many cases of fantasy fiction, spells are merely an interesting by-product of a magical world and exist only to differentiate those learned in the magical arts from ordinary mortals. However, in her series, Rowling uses the discipline of spellwork to show us Harry's growth throughout his seven years in the magical community, both in his education and in his humanity. As the novels progress and Harry's knowledge of wizardry and his destiny increases, Rowling demonstrates to her reader that spellwork is privileged speech and she therefore employs spellwork as one of the key indicators of Harry's maturity and mastery of the wizarding world. For Rowling's hero, the ability to perform magic is what initially sets Harry apart and allows him to escape from the abusive environment of Number 4 Privet Drive and his life with the Mugglest of Muggles, the Dursleys. However, it is when he arrives at Hogwarts and starts to learn how to channel his magic through spells that we see Harry begin to transform himself from the passive "Boy Who Lived" to the active defender of his community.

First, it is important to understand how spellwork operates in the series as a language that must be studied and mastered, so I would like to begin by examining a lesson from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in which Harry learns how to perform a spell. In this scene, Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher—and reluctant werewolf—Remus Lupin, gives his class of young wizards a practical lesson on defeating their darkest fears, which are made manifest by the magical creature (called a Bogart) in the closet who shape-shifts to

become whatever his victim fears most. Each student, though he faces the embodiment of his own particular nightmare, is armed with the same weapons as every other student: he has his wand, his will, and a spell (in this case, the *Riddikkulus* spell). As each wizard-in-training waves a wand and cries out "*Riddikkulus!,*" the importance of the *synthesis* of these elements in allowing the student to confidently dispose of his nemesis becomes apparent. In this scene, Rowling shows us that a weapon and desire are not enough for Harry to defeat the forces of evil. It is the spell, articulated verbally or nonverbally, but performed with accuracy and deliberation, that seals the deal.

Rowling intimates that spellwork is a tricky business from the first book when the students start their lessons, although initially mistakes of spellwork were mostly amusing. The young wizards (especially Neville Longbottom, Seamus Finnigan, and Ron Weasley) have several regrettable incidents when shoddy spell work gets the better of them, and even the some of the adult wizards never achieve mastery of spell language as we witness with the fiasco that occurred as a result of Gilderoy Lockhart's ludicrous psychobabble. Here, nonsense language is just that: nonsense. When Lockhart mispronounces and inaccurately performs the spell to subdue a horde of Cornish pixies, his mistake is supposed to be humorous, but it also indicates to the reader that manipulating this specialized language isn't always as easy as Hermione makes it out to be. It takes work, understanding, and practice to turn a hedgehog into a pincushion. Or, in other words, it takes work, understanding, and practice to achieve the creative potential of words.

Furthermore, as we progress deeper into the series, Rowling intimates that incorrect spellwork—whether it is by mispronunciation, misuse, or misdirection—is not always comical. For example, in his sixth year, when Harry uses a spell (*Sectumsempra*) that he

found scribbled in his Potions textbook against school bully Draco Malfoy and almost fatally wounds his nemesis, Harry feels the power of magical language with full force. He learns in this scene that words can be dangerous, even lethal, and he also learns that spells can betray you if you neglect to divine their deeper meaning through careful study. Likewise, when Ron splinches himself in *Deathly Hallows* and is terribly wounded, Wilkie Twycross's seemingly humorous "Three D's of Apparition" (Destination, Determination, and Deliberation) become alarmingly imperative for the three young wizards' survival.

Thus, as he continues his magical education, Harry learns that spellwork is not just stringing words together, but also semantics *and* semiotics. As Bellatrix Lestrange tells Harry, to successfully cast spells, one has to mean them. J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words,* where he explains Speech Act Theory, is helpful in understanding Rowling's purpose in creating this magical language. In his essay, Austin tells us two key things: first, he tells us that "words do not have meaning in and of themselves; they are affected by the situation, the speaker, and the listener."[328] And second, he tells us that speech is not passive—it can actively change the reality it is describing. Austin claims that "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as *just saying something*."[329] By this, he means that our words reflect our inner states. When I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, my words convey my personal resolve to carry out my oath; my word *is* my bond. So, if our words are our bonds, we are *acting* through speech, which means that our words connect us, irrevocably, to our deeds[330].

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[328] J. L. Austin. *How to Do Things with Words*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 6-7.

[329] Ibid.

[330] Ibid., 10.

What is interesting for Rowling's purposes about this power of words is that their abstract creative potential lends itself wonderfully to magic because as we read *Harry Potter*, we witness how performative utterances directly translate themselves into actions in the story. When it comes to spells, it is not the case that the words are one thing and the action another; rather, words and actions become absolutely equivalent. Thus, when Harry performs a spell, it is not merely an utterance, but also an act of meaning-making.

As the creator of a magical world, Rowling wants to differentiate her spell language order to make it seem like it possesses a direct power not associated with ordinary language. This language, like nonsense, creates reality and, in so doing, reveals the tension that exists between meaning and its absence. Thus, ordinary language, even if it is manipulated into verse or a string of alliterative imperatives, will not do[331]. Rowling therefore uses Latin as the base for her spells. Latin is separate from ordinary life in that it archaic, and, as there are no longer any native speakers of Latin it is estranged from our common parlance. Yet because it is so often at the core of our modern vernacular, it is still comprehensible to us. As a result, similar to Lewis Carroll's nonsense poems like "Jabberwocky," what at first seems like nonsense is actually, upon closer analysis, somewhat understandable. But Carrollian and Learian nonsense lack a coherence that allows for their words to be understood in isolation. While

> *'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves*
> *Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:*
> *All mimsy were the borogroves,*

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[331] Rowling demonstrates to us that ordinary language cannot operate in the same way as her spell language when Ron attempts a fake spell given to him by his brother (a known prankster): Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow, turn this great big fat rat yellow! Not only does the spell not work because Scabbers is not truly a rat, but also because Ron attempts magic with ordinary vernacular.

And the mome raths outgrabe.[332]

can be deciphered when the reader or listener hears the words in succession, when they are

isolated, "brillig," "slithy," "toves," "gimble," "wabe," "mimsy," "borogroves," "mome,"

"raths," and "outgrabe" may hint at a definition due to their phonetics, but they are not part

of an established lexicon. Rather, these are nonce words, lexemes created for a particular

occasion in order to solve a problem of communication. Indeed, Carroll not only creates

nonce words, but he demonstrates how and why they are employed with the dialogue that

occurs between Alice and Humpty Dumpty:

> "That's enough to being with," Humpty Dumpty
> interrupted: "there are plenty of hard words there. '*Brillig*' means
> four o'clock in the afternoon—the time when you begin *broiling*
> things for dinner."
> "That'll do very well," said Alice: "and '*slithy*'?"
> "Well '*slithy*' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same
> as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two
> meanings packed up into one word."
> "I see it now," Alice remarked thoughtfully: "and what are
> '*toves*'?"
> "Well, '*toves*' are something like badgers—they're
> something like lizards—and they're something like corkscrews."[333]

Here, by giving his definition of each "hard word" in the poem, Humpty Dumpty

inadvertently demonstrates that nonce words are essentially meaningless and disposable.

For example, when he claims "slithy" is like a portmanteau word which combines the words

"lithe" and "slimy" and their morphemes and meanings into a new word, he reveals that it is

merely an invented linguistic form as "slithy" was not part of the Victorian English lexicon

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[332] Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, 187.

[333] Ibid.

and had no meaning outside the text. The word "slithy" in isolation and without Humpty

Dumpty's definition may thus *hint* at meaning, but the word itself does not have meaning in

our language.

In contrast, by having Latin (and, on occasion, other real/operative languages[334] like

Hebrew[335] and the West African Sidiki dialect[336]) at its root, Rowling's spell language

achieves a level of sophistication and complexity that surpasses previous nonsense language.

Like Carroll's nonce words, and, indeed, like her own "Muggle," "Squib," and "kneazle"

Rowling's spells are indeed neologisms, but Rowling's formulation of this particular kind of

neolexia is meticulously prescribed in order to instill each word with a creative authority

that has the power to actually change the reality of her fictional world. The rules that govern

spell language are thus specific and logical: every spell consists of either one or two words,

pronunciation is crucial to the success of the spell[337] and normally imitates the pronunciation

considered to be "correct" in the base language (again, primarily correct Latin

pronunciation), the spell must be accompanied by the correct wand movement[338], and the

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[334] Perhaps an explanation for the use of these other languages is that Rowling herself is multi-lingual, having received her BA in Classics and French, and has also admitted in numerous interviews to being attracted to interesting languages and words.

[335] The Hebrew words "abra kadavra" are reworked for Rowling's Killing Curse, *Avada Kedavra*.

[336] The West African Sidiki dialect used in geomancy is the base for the spell *Alohomora*, which translates literally as "friendly to thieves." Rowling, J. K. (14 April 2008). Statement of J. K. Rowling in testimony during the WB and JKR vs. RDR Books. Retrieved on 27 November 2014 from http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/docs/jkrtrialday1.txt.

[337] We know this to be true because of several incidents in the novels where the wizard mispronounced the spell and thus did not achieve the intended result. Notable examples include Ron Weasley's first attempts at *Wingardium Leviosa* (Book 1), Harry's first attempts at *Expecto Patronum* (Book 3), and Neville Longbottom's attempts at *Stupify* after he had been punched in the mouth during the battle at the Ministry of Magic (Book 5).

[338] Gilderoy Lockhart's unsuccessful spellcasting provides evidence for this. His wild gesticulations during the duel lesson as well as the fiasco in the classroom resulted in failure. Nymphadora

caster's intent must be clear and his/her will must be strong. For example, let us now examine the spell *Expelliarmus*. This spell magically disarms another wizard by expelling the wand—the most deadly weapon in the wizarding world—out of his or her opponent's hand. In Latin, *expello* refers to the act of driving out or thrusting away. *Arma* means weapons and the ending, *-mus*, while it is not an ending for nouns, it *is* an ending used for verbs in first person, plural, active forms. So, if we put them all together, we realize Rowling has ingeniously created a new verb for her spell. The *–mus* gives us the "We," the *expel*— gives us the "drive or thrust away" and the *–arm* gives us the "weapons." So "*Expelliarmus!*" becomes "We thrust or drive away the weapons!"

But what makes Rowling's language of enchantment even more complex and meaningful, what elevates it still further above previous nonsense languages in children's literature, is how the employment of certain spells is related to her characters' actions and decisions. For example, for her deadliest villain Rowling creates a deadly spell.

Spell 1: *Avada Kedavra*

Avada Kedavra, the killing curse, is one of only three curses in the wizarding that are labeled Unforgiveable[339], and it is Lord Voldemort's signature spell. When Harry enters the wizarding world, he learns that he is the only known survivor of this incantation and the scar on Harry's forehead is the only visible marker left by its curse. Interestingly, *Avada Kedavra* is one of the only incantations without a Latin derivation. Instead, it seems to

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Tonks's incorrect wand movement in Book 5 resulted in her failure to pack as neatly or as effectively as her mother was wont. She makes the claim that Andromeda Tonks can get the socks to fold themselves due to a kind of flick she employs when casting the spell for packing.

[339] The three Unforgiveable Curses are *Avada Kedavra* (the killing curse), The Cruciatus Curse or *Crucio* (the torture curse), and the Imperius Curse or *Imperio* (the curse by which the castor assumes complete control over the victim).

come from a play on "*Abracadabra*," but further probing leads us to "*ebra kidbara*," an ancient Hebrew-Aramaic expression for, "I will create with words" or "I create as I speak."[340] By contrast, it is perhaps ironic that Rowling's *Avada Kedavra* is the ultimate spell of destruction. However, if we look closer at the words, we see that Rowling has changed the "b's" to "v's" making *cadabra* sound more like *cadaver*, linking the word to death in the way that it is uttered. So instead of "I will create with words" it means, in this series, "I will destroy with words." During an audience interview at the Edinburgh Book Festival, Rowling confirmed the spell's Aramaic origins and translated it as 'let the thing be destroyed.' She continued: "Originally, it was used to cure illness and the 'thing' was the illness, but I decided to make it the 'thing' as in the person standing in front of me. I take a lot of liberties with things like that. I twist them round and make them mine." [341] According to Friedrich Vollmer, the first known mention of the word was in a book written by the third century AD Roman emperor Caracalla's physician, Quintus Serenus Sammonicus, entitled *Liber Medicinalis*. In this book, he prescribed that malaria sufferers wear an amulet with the spell written on it in the form of a triangle, claiming that the power of the spell and the amulet would make the disease go away.

This historical connection of spell and object is repeated in Rowling's series. In *Half-Blood Prince*, we learn that Voldemort used the killing curse for the first time when he was a teenager, killing Moaning Myrtle. In so doing, he uses the spell to create his first Horcrux, an object in which a Dark witch or wizard encases and hides a fragment of his soul

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[340] Craig Conley, *Magical Words: A Dictionary*. 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2008), 66.

[341] Interview with J. K. Rowling, Edinburgh Book Festival, 15 April 2004. J.K. Rowling Official Site.

in order to achieve immortality. By creating a Horcrux, the witch or wizard tethers his soul

to the earth so that if his/her body is destroyed, s/he will not die. Thus, the more Horcruxes

a wizard creates, the closer he is to true immortality. Voldemort intended to make six

Horcruxes in order to have a seven-part soul (the seventh part would reside in his body),

seven being "the most powerfully magical number."[342] However, in his haste and greed for

immortality, Voldemort did not consider the possibility that splitting the soul multiple times

could render it so unstable that it could be costly to the castor, physically disfiguring him

and diminishing his humanity. This is, in fact, what happened in Voldemort's own case. In

sacrificing herself to save Harry, Lily Potter used her own life to cast a protective charm

around her infant son, causing Voldemort's curse to rebound upon himself. Consequently,

while his earlier Horcruxes did indeed insure that Voldemort did not die from his own

rebounding curse, because Voldemort's soul had been made so precarious by his previous

success in ripping it apart, the damaged soul that remained in his body split involuntarily

due to the power of the curse, and thus one of the pieces attached itself onto Harry, while the

other attached itself to what remained of Voldemort[343]. Therefore, not only does Voldemort

destroy with the words of this spell, he also creates destructive objects with them. As a

result, *Avada Kedavra* became the defining incantation of Voldemort's life, not only

because he often employed it, but because his life and identity became so intertwined with

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[342] We know this from Voldemort's conversation with Professor Slughorn which Harry witnesses in the Pensieve in *Half-Blood Prince*.

[343] Voldemort's body was temporarily destroyed when his soul broke apart, thus, the second part of the soul still existed, but it had no permanent casing because Voldemort had no corporeal form ("I was less than spirit, I was less than the meanest ghost"). Therefore, Voldemort had to possess the bodies of animals and, famously, Quirinus Quirrell, in order to move around. However, because this part of him remained, he was able to re-form his body in *Goblet of Fire*.

its meaning. As Voldemort continued to employ the killing curse throughout his life, fragmenting his soul for each "significant"[344] death, we witness the simultaneous dissolution of his humanity. Voldemort not only becomes physically disfigured, which we witness in the Pensieve as, from memory to memory, his once-handsome face becomes first "hollow-cheeked," then blurred and burned looking and pale as wax, then snake-like with slits for nostrils and red eyes, but also less human emotionally. Each time Voldemort employs the *Avada Kedavra* curse and creates a Horcrux, his humanity decreases, thus making it easier for him to kill again, and consequently the (literally) vicious circle repeats itself. We also know that Voldemort's humanity has diminished so much that it would be impossible for him to reverse the damage that he has done. Dumbledore tells us that the only way the creation of a Horcrux can be reversed is for the creator to feel true remorse for his actions. However, when Harry encounters the flayed embodiment of Voldemort in the limbo-Kings Cross Station, Dumbledore tells Harry that Voldemort is "beyond anyone's help," suggesting that Voldemort has passed beyond the point of feeling any human emotion like remorse. When Harry duels Voldemort in the final battle scene, he entreats Voldemort to try for some remorse, but Voldemort is bewildered by such a suggestion. Fittingly, in this last battle with Harry, Rowling again indicates that Voldemort's identity and destiny are closely related to this spell, as, this time, with no Horcruxes remaining to him, Voldemort is killed by his own rebounding curse.

Spell 2: *Sectumsempra*

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[344] We know from Dumbledore that Voldemort originally intended to reserve his Horcrux creation for particularly significant deaths. For example, the Horcrux diary was made to mark the first time he killed; the Horcrux ring was made when he murdered his father and grandparents, thus eradicating his connection with his Muggle lineage; he intended to make a Horcrux after he killed Harry because Harry was prophesied to be the one threat to his power.

Another example of this connection between spell word and inner life in Rowling's series occurs with the spell *Sectumsempra*. The result of this spell is to wound the opponent with deep cuts into the body that cannot be healed with ordinary magic. The first part of the spell comes from the Latin *sectum*, which means "having been cut" (comparable to "section" or "segmented") while *sempra* is derived from "semper," which means "always." So the spell can be translated as "always cutting" or "sever forever," which, interestingly, also indicates the spell's creator, Severus Snape. Snape, who is one of the most intriguing characters of the novel, created this spell when he was at Hogwarts and, judging from the book, *Advanced Potion Making* for N.E.W.T. level students[345], the year in which he created the spell was his sixth at Hogwarts School. This timing is significant, because it means that the year Snape created the spell was when he was planning on joining Voldemort's Death Eaters and, most significantly, it was also the year after which he irrevocably severed his relationship with Lily Potter. In a scene Harry witnesses in the Pensieve, Snape fights with James Potter after his O.W.L. exams, and, when Lily Potter (Lily Evans at this time) comes to his aid, in his embarrassment and fury, Snape calls her "Mudblood," the most offensive term for someone who is Muggle-born. Up until this point in Snape's life, his love for Lily had always conquered his prejudice against Muggle-born wizards, a struggle that we witness when he tells the eleven-year-old Lily that it makes no difference that she is Muggle-born despite his initial hesitation.[346] Here, however, the other influences in Snape's life (his

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[345] *Advanced Potion Making* by Libatius Borage is a potions spellbook used for N. E. W. T. students, which are students in their sixth year at Hogwarts.

[346] 'Does it make any difference, being Muggle-born?'

Snape hesitated. His black eyes, eager in the greenish gloom, moved over the pale face, the dark red hair.

future Death Eater friends like Avery, Mulciber, and Lucius Malfoy, his bad relationship with his Muggle father, his jealousy of James Potter, and his own fascination with the Dark Arts) momentarily override his love for Lily and his underlying prejudice against her blood status becomes his instinctive retaliation. From this, Lily finally sees that Severus is not the same boy she met when she was eleven and that their beliefs are irreconcilable. Therefore, though Snape pleads for her forgiveness, Lily remains immovable, not believing him when he says it was an accident:

> 'Slipped out?' There was no pity in Lily's voice. 'It's too late. I've made excuses for you for years. None of my friends can understand why I even talk to you. You and your precious little Death Eater friends – you see, you don't even deny it! You don't even deny that's what you're all aiming to be! You can't wait to join You-Know-Who, can you?'
> He opened his mouth, but closed it without speaking.
> 'I can't pretend anymore. You've chosen your way, I've chosen mine.'
> 'No – listen, I didn't mean – '
> ' – to call me Mudblood? But you call everyone of my birth Mudblood, Severus. Why should I be any different?'
> He struggled on the verge of speech, but with a contemptuous look she turned and climbed back through the portrait hole …[347]

'No,' he said. 'It doesn't make any difference.' (*Deathly Hallows*, 535)

…

We also witness Snape's quell his prejudice on the train ride to Hogwarts in their first year when Lily is distressed that her Muggle sister, Petunia, is angry with her:

'She's only a – ' He caught himself quickly; Lily, too busy trying to wipe her eyes without being noticed, did not hear him. (*Deathly Hallows*, 538)

[347] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 542.

In this scene, as we witness how one word destroyed a relationship, we also come to an understanding of the intimate connection between Snape and his spell, *Sectumsempra*. Because he was unable to deny Lily's claims about his intentions regarding the Dark Lord and his followers, and because he could not bring himself to tell Lily that he loved her, he became "severed forever" from the person whom he treasured most in the world, and whom he would love, as he famously told Dumbledore, "always." In the year that followed, the same year in which he created this spell, Snape also adopted the moniker "The Half-Blood Prince," further allying himself to Voldemort because, like his master, he wished to reject his own name in order to cut ties with his Muggle lineage. "Half-Blood" indicates Snape's blood status in the wizarding community and "Prince" refers to his mother's maiden name, therefore Snape rejects any connection with his Muggle father in the formulation of his new identity. Additionally, as Prince also indicates royalty, it is clear that Severus believed he would assume an important role in Voldemort's new regime. In this way, his new name tethered him even more closely to the deeper meaning of his spell: by changing his name from Severus Snape—the boy who was once Lily's friend and companion, and who once had the conscience and autonomy to struggle with moral evaluation—to the Half-Blood Prince—the servant of Voldemort whose own beliefs and will were subservient to those of the Dark Lord—Snape lost the moral agency that he once had as the boy Severus. It is only later, when he realized the information he passed to Voldemort would cause Lily's death, that Snape rejects his self-generated sobriquet, his pride, and his prejudice, and regains his moral agency.

Any sound of Dumbledore Apparating had been drowned
by the sound of the wind in the branches. He stood before Snape

with his robes whipping around him, and his face was illuminated from below from the light cast by his wand.

     'Well, Severus? What message does Lord Voldemort have for me?'

     'No – no message – I'm here on my own account!'

     'I – I come with a warning – no, a request – please – '[348]

Here, Snape rejects his role as messenger for Voldemort and deliberately defies him by telling Dumbledore the Dark Lord's intentions regarding Harry Potter. His rapid self-editing as he states his reason for the meeting demonstrates his choice to put aside the pretension he might have exhibited as one of Voldemort's inner circle, forsaking even his dignity when he changes "warning" to "request," and adds the humble "please," asking Dumbledore to save Lily and her family. Snape's ultimate decision to turn spy for Dumbledore therefore reestablishes Snape's previous identity, which was centered around his love for Lily. From this point onward in the book, all of Snape's actions have been to atone for his accidental but fatal betrayal of her, which began with his calling her Mudblood and severing their friendship. Therefore, when Dumbledore questions Snape's loyalty, Snape demonstrates that his allegiance has never wavered since he took his oath after Lily's death, because his entire selfhood depends upon this desire to reestablish his relationship to her:

     'I have spied for you, and lied for you, put myself in mortal danger for you. Everything was supposed to be to keep Lily Potter's son safe. Now you tell me you have been raising him like a pig for slaughter –'

     'But this is touching, Severus,' said Dumbledore seriously. 'Have you grown to care for the boy, after all?'

     'For *him*?' shouted Snape. '*Expecto patronum!*'

     From the tip of his wand burst the silver doe: she landed on the office floor, bounded once across the office and soared out of the window. Dumbledore watched her fly away, and as her silvery

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[348] Ibid., 543.

glow faded he turned back to Snape, and his eyes were full of tears.

> 'After all this time?'
> 'Always,' said Snape.[349]

We know from Harry's last dialogue with Voldemort that Snape never cast a Patronus in front of Voldemort, because his Patronus was a doe, the same as Lily's, and would have revealed that his love for her had surpassed his loyalty to the Dark Lord. Finally, after Snape allies himself with Dumbledore, we never witness Snape perform the *Sectumsempra* spell successfully again. Rather, we see him heal the wounds inflicted by the spell on Draco Malfoy in *Half-Blood Prince*, and we witness him miss his target during the Battle of the Seven Potters in *Deathly Hallows*. This is because, I think, Snape has regained his connection with Lily, thus his selfhood has changed from The Half-Blood Prince back into his true identity as Severus Snape and he therefore cannot mean the spell the way he once did.

It follows, then, that spells are the translation of a wizard's very core. Spellwork is the way one takes the power, desires, and meanings within oneself and transmits them outward. As Plutarch once wrote, and a J.K. Rowling repeated in her Commencement Address to Harvard University: "What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality." In *Harry Potter,* spellwork demonstrates the process of Harry's education as the hero of Rowling's series. As the novels progress, Harry's growth as a moral agent is reflected in his acquisition of spell language, specifically his mastery of certain spells and his choice in which spells he employs. As Harry proceeds through his magical education, he learns hundreds of spells (see a complete list on the Harry Potter Wiki), but there are only two

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[349] Ibid., 552.

incantations that come to be directly associated with him: *Expecto Patronum* and *Expelliarmus*.

Spell 4: *Expecto Patronum*

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry enters into his third year of magical education as the wizarding world is shaken with the news that Sirius Black, a (supposedly) former Death Eater and known wizard and Muggle-killer, has escaped from the wizard prison, Azkaban. Harry is at first unaware of the Ministry of Magic's assumption that Black broke out of Azkaban in order to murder Harry, though he later learns the truth when he overhears a conversation between Arthur and Molly Weasley. Again by unintentional eavesdropping, Harry also learns that Black was one his parents' closest friends, Harry's own godfather, and that he was (again, supposedly) the person who betrayed Harry's parents' whereabouts to Voldemort, leading directly to their deaths. As a precaution to prevent Black from entering, Dementors are brought from their normal posts at Azkaban to Hogwarts to guard the castle. Dementors, non-beings and Dark creatures who sense and feed on the positive emotions of human beings in order to survive, also force their victims to relive their worst memories over and over again. Thus, when Harry comes into contact with Dementors, he is forced to relive his parents' deaths, hearing their last moments as James Potter attempts to fight Voldemort so that Lily can escape with Harry and as Lily pleads with Voldemort for mercy for her son. Consequently, when Professor Lupin asks the class to envisage their worst fear, it is the Dementor that Harry conjures to mind. After collapsing on the Hogwarts Express and at a Quidditch match due to their presence, Harry asks Professor Lupin to teach him the spell will help him defend himself against them: *Expecto Patronum*.

Again, obeying Rowling's rules for spell language, *Expecto* (or *exspecto*) is taken directly from Latin; it is a verb meaning 'to await' or 'to expect.' However, the roots of the word run deeper. *Ex* is a preposition meaning 'out from' and the noun *pectus* refers to the 'breast,' 'heart,' or 'soul': in other words, the literal and figurative cores of a person. *Patronus* is derived first from *pater*, or father, and in Roman Antiquity a *patronus* was a protector and benefactor, especially in terms of providing legal representation or political support. The client, in return, performed various deeds and services for their patron. *Patronum* is therefore directly translated from the Latin and it is also correctly declined for its context as the direct object of a verb. When they utter the phrase *Expecto Patronum*, Rowling's wizards—the castors of spells—must create their own, unique guardians with their words. Thus, when Harry performs the *Expecto Patronum* spell, he invokes a silvery stag guardian[350] who bursts from the core of his wand in order to protect him from Dementors. What is more, in order to successfully cast a Patronus, the wizard must think of a moment in which he or she was truly happy and often the Patronus reflects that memory in some way[351], further tethering the words and the wizard together.

Harry's Patronus and his ability to cast it become crucial to Harry's survival and also to his identity. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry learns for the first time some of the details surrounding his parents' death at the hands of Voldemort. By overhearing Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge in The Three Broomsticks, Harry learns that his parents put their

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[350] Interestingly, Harry has the same Patronus as his father.

[351] For example, Severus Snape's Patronus is a doe, the representation of Lily Potter, which indicates that his happiest memories were those he spent with her. Likewise, Nymphadora Tonks's Patronus changes in Book 6 into a form that resembles the werewolf, revealing her love for Remus Lupin.

trust in one of their friends to act as a Secret Keeper[352] to their location in Godric's Hollow. However, he learns that the guardian of the secret, Peter Pettigrew (not Sirius Black), betrayed his parents and told Voldemort where to find them. This breech of trust is therefore the reason that Harry was orphaned. When Harry finally realizes that the true traitor is Peter Pettigrew, he also gains a guardian and paternal figure in Sirius Black. At the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, when he and Sirius Black are under a near-fatal attack from the Dementors, it is *Expecto Patronum* that comes to Harry's aid. Harry, who returns from the future to help prevent Sirius's capture, realizes that the caster of the Patronus that saved their lives in the past was not his father, returned to life or in ghostly form, but himself. Thus, in conjuring his Patronus, Harry recovers his legal guardian, but also discovers a guardian within himself. In the books that follow, Harry becomes known throughout the wizarding community for his ability to conjure a corporeal Patronus because he illegally employs *Expecto Patronum* in the Muggle world in order to save his cousin Dudley when he is attacked by Dementors in Little Whinging. What is more, despite the reprimand from the Ministry (who, at this time, has ostracized both Harry and Dumbledore in their attempt to deny Lord Voldemort's return) in *Order of the Phoenix,* Harry defies Dolores Umbridge and teaches the Patronus charm to the members of Dumbledore's Army, desiring all witches and wizards, regardless of age, to be able to defend themselves against Voldemort and his

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[352] A Secret Keeper is the official term for a witch or wizard who is designated to hide a secret by means of the Fidelius Charm. Once a Secret Keeper is selected, the person who first told the secret is unable to further pass on the information to anyone else. The secret is embedded in the Secret Keeper's soul and, though s/he can pass on the secret to as many people as s/he desires, the secret must be passed on voluntarily, and thus cannot be retrieved by means of bewitchment, blackmail, or torture. If a Secret Keeper dies, all of the people who have been told the secret become Secret Keepers, a result which dilutes the effectiveness of the charm. However, if the Secret Keeper dies without having revealed the secret, the secret dies with him.

followers. Harry's essence as a defender and a leader is therefore linked to this spell, and he again employs it in *Deathly Hallows* when he defends Muggle-born Mrs. Cattermole from Umbridge and leads the rest of the detainees out of the hostile Ministry. Additionally, Harry's Patronus, a stag, is the same as his father's Patronus (and his Animagus form, Prongs), as well as the male version of his mother Lily's Patronus, a doe. Thus, Harry finds, at his core, his identity as his parents' son. Lily and James Potter died to defend Harry from Voldemort and thus Harry's Patronus is a symbolic reminder both of their sacrifice and their example. Therefore, when Harry realizes that he is the unintended Horcrux and that he must die in order to defend the wizard community, he enters the Forbidden Forest to face Voldemort and sacrifices himself as, sixteen years earlier, his parents did for him.

As he learns how to master one spell after another during the seven years of his education, Harry also learns how to decipher which spells feel the most "true" for him. These spells are not "Unforgivable," offensive spells like the *Cruciatus* curse, the *Imperius* curse, or the *Avada Kedavra* curse, but defensive spells, like *Expecto Patronum*, the stunning spell *Stupefy*, and, of course, *Expelliarmus*, the disarming spell. This is not to say that Harry is unable to master any of these offensive spells. He has the intelligence and the ability to be able to perform them successfully, and he even has the anger, desire for control, and hate necessary to mean them. And yet, we see Harry perform the *Imperius* curse in only one scene throughout the entire seven book series[353], and he performs the *Cruciatus* curse only three times throughout the series.[354] He never once uses the *Avada Kedavra* curse. In

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[353] Though he uses this spell, it is only in order to prevent the Death Eaters from discovering that he, Ron, and Hermione are trying to destroy a Horcrux in Gringotts Bank.

[354] The first time is against Bellatrix Lestrange who had just killed his godfather, Sirius Black; the second is against Severus Snape, who had just (to Harry's knowledge) killed Albus Dumbledore; and

this way, Rowling shows us that Harry is a morally courageous character who uses

defensive spells to distinguish himself from his destructive enemy and show that, at his core,

he is the defender and savior of his community. Thus, Harry consciously (and even

sometimes unconsciously) chooses to transmit his inner strengths and magical abilities

outward through his spellwork in order to change his reality for the better.

Spell 5: *Expelliarmus*

Consequently, it is the *Expelliarmus* spell in particular that Harry relies upon, even in

both instances when he faces his mortal enemy at a disadvantage[355]. Harry identifies with

this spell because, I would like to argue finally, this spell is the closest translation of Harry's

inner self and his role in the wizarding world. In the misty King's Cross Station,

Dumbledore tells us that Harry is the ultimate defender of love, loyalty, and innocence,

things of which Voldemort is completely ignorant. He also tells us that Harry's choice to

sacrifice himself as a last resort to defend his community rather than to fight Voldemort in

the forest, has made all the difference. Throughout his story, as others around Harry, like

his parents, Sirius, Dumbledore, Mad-Eye, and Dobby died to defend him, Harry, in turn,

picked up their mantles and felt responsible for defending their beliefs. And with this

assumption of responsibility also came a kind of instinct in his spellwork, as if at the most

crucial moments of his life, his very essence as this defender manifests itself in his

incantations, the way he communicates the unique magic within himself to the outside

world. He is almost like an athlete in the way the lessons that he has learned throughout his

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the third is against Amycus Carrow in reaction to the Death Eater plotting to let Voldemort kill
students and then spitting in the protesting Professor McGonagall's face.

[355] Harry faces Voldemort in the graveyard of Little Hangleton in *The Goblet of Fire* and again in the
Forbidden Forest in *The Deathly Hallows*.

magical education have seeped into his core and mingled with his own nature; as a result, his

choice of defensive spell over offensive spell is like a reflex. This is why when Harry could

have seriously injured or killed Stan Shunpike in the beginning of *The Deathly Hallows*, he

reacted by disarming him instead of cursing him as he did Draco Malfoy in *The Half-Blood*

Prince. His previous use of offensive language taught him restraint; the kind of wizard and

person he wants to be does not intentionally harm anyone. This code of honor manifests

itself outwardly in what Lupin calls Harry's "signature spell," *Expelliarmus,* which he

employs even in his last battle against Voldemort.

> A red-gold glow burst suddenly across the enchanted sky above
> them, as an edge of dazzling sun appeared over the sill of the
> nearest window. The light hit both of their faces at the same time,
> so that Voldemort's was suddenly a flaming blur. Harry heard the
> high voice shriek as he, too, yelled his best hope to the heavens,
> pointing Draco's wand:
> > *'Avada Kedavra!'*
> > *'Expelliarmus!'*[356]

In this final scene, when Harry yells *Expelliarmus* as Voldemort cries his own signature

spell, Rowling tells us that Harry is casting his "best hope" to the heavens. He is driving

away the fiercest weapon, "*Avada Kedavra*," or, destruction through words.

Finally, I would argue that what Harry discovers is his "best hope" is this deep

respect for language that, in this series, is tied so closely and so irrevocably to life. Harry's

signature spell is intimately bound to his essence as a defender and his cultivated respect for

every human (and nonhuman) life. Therefore, as we witness Harry's wizarding education,

we also watch him make moral choices about what to do with his power. Which is why, in

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[356] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 595.

this final battle, he refuses to kill Lord Voldemort outright. Instead, he allows Voldemort be

the destroyer and use destructive language because Harry has learned that to be identified

with the *Expelliarmus* spell isn't a bad thing at all, but rather, it is these kind of spells that

have transformed his own life and allowed him to navigate his way toward becoming one of

the saviors of his world.

In this way, Rowling revolutionizes the nonsense mode in children's literature by

employing nonsense language not only in order to create an effective and aesthetically

pleasing reality, but also as a device for a moral education of the self. And, ultimately, we

could make the argument that this whole series is about how to do things with words, or how

to actively transform our reality through our language. I believe that this is perhaps the most

crucial element that Rowling wants us to take away from her novel: that children's tales are

a critical part of our education as human beings. Rowling gives us a hero who learns to

appreciate the seriousness of children's tales, like *The Tale of the Three Brothers*[357], because

he has witnessed first-hand, through spellwork, the profound power of the simple expression

of complex thought. Thus, Rowling intimates to us that one of the necessary vehicles for

living a good life is learning how to create ourselves through words: language, working

through narrative, stimulates the imagination of a child and reveals to him or her the most

accessible path to altruistic behavior by inspiring critical thought and the conscious

understanding of the sensations of another. When we read, we think and we feel. Through

this imaginative and transformative process of entering another arena, becoming acquainted

with its inhabitants and geography, and successfully navigating the way through acts of

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[357] *The Tale of the Three Brothers* in which three wizards encounter death and receive magical
objects from him becomes integral to the framing narrative and crucial to the survival and success of
Harry's mission.

heroism and villainy, heartache and triumph, deception and truth, readers discover their most extraordinary and uniquely human capacities: the ability to empathize and to envision a better life for themselves and for others. When a wizard learns how to tame and manipulate his wand through spellwork, he comes to possess an object that can actually transform his reality for the better. Similarly, I believe that the main goal of children's literature today is for the child-reader, when he or she comes out on the other side of the book, to no longer be holding an object that is morally neutral. Thus, children's novels do not just function as tools to learn how to read, but tools to learn how to live. And in the final scene in King's Cross Station, Dumbledore agrees with me: 'Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?'[358]

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[358] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 579.

Chapter Five
Brave New (Wizarding) World

In this chapter, I demonstrate that contemporary children's fiction's power comes from the way it combines story and art by bringing together both the children's literature tradition and the tradition of the adult novel and the values to which they are allied. By examining the way contemporary texts for children move beyond the expected conventions of works of fantasy, I argue that writers like Rowling raise the stakes of their narratives and change the tradition.

And the great realistic fictions are exuberant with details, even when they are melancholy thematically. The alienation implied by description is partially compensated for by the sheer pleasure of being able to *see*, as though for the first time, the clutter of furniture, the cut of clothing, the mutton chop and the mug of hot rum, the flushed cheeks of Mr. Jones, and the dull grey eyes of Amos Barton. This very vitality of detail is part of the realist's gestures at life, for they will not succumb to the conventions of patterning.
–George Levine[359]

"When you look at what C. S. Lewis is saying, his message is so anti-life, so cruel, so unjust. The view that the Narnia books have for the material world is one of almost undisguised contempt. At one point, the old professor says, 'It's all in Plato' – meaning that the physical world we see around us is the crude, shabby, imperfect, second-rate copy of something much better."
-Philip Pullman[360], Interview with The New York Times

In his afterword to *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov writes about his novel's initial

reception and, indeed, rejection by several publishing firms:

> Certain techniques at the beginning of *Lolita* (Humbert's Journal,
> for example) misled some of my first readers into assuming that
> this was going to be a lewd book. They expected the rising
> succession of erotic scenes; when they stopped, the readers
> stopped, too, and felt bored and let down.[361]

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[359] George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 21.

[360] Sarah Lyall, "The Man Who Dared Make Religion the Villain; In British Author's Trilogy, Great Adventures Aren't Pegged to the Great Beyond," *New York Times* (7 November 2000).

[361] Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 313.

It may seem absurd or uncomfortable to compare the revolutionary work that was done for

the novel by a text that tells the story of a pedophile to the revolutionary work that *Harry*

Potter and other contemporary children's literature are doing for their literary category, but,

as I warned in the Introduction that this dissertation would be a game of comparisons, I

expect now, dear reader, that you are still on board.

In the quote above, Nabokov expresses his suspicion that the reason why not all four

publishing firms accepted or even read the entirety of his *Lolita* manuscript was because

they were confused as to its genre. He muses at length about the reasons why, and while I

will not repeat all of Nabokov's explanations or suspicions, the following paragraph is

relevant for the argument at hand:

> While it is true that in ancient Europe, and well into the eighteenth
> century (obvious examples come from France), deliberate
> lewdness was not inconsistent with flashes of comedy, or vigorous
> satire, or even the verve of a fine poet in a wanton mood, it is also
> true that in modern times the term "pornography" connotes
> mediocrity, commercialism, and certain strict rules of narration.
> Obscenity must be mated with banality because every kind of
> aesthetic enjoyment has to be entirely replaced by simple sexual
> stimulation which demands the traditional word for direct action
> upon the patient. Old rigid rules must be followed by the
> pornographer in order to have his patient feel the same security of
> satisfaction as, for example, fans of detective stories feel—stories
> where, if you do not watch out, the real murderer may turn out to
> be, to the fan's disgust, artistic originality (who for instance would
> want a detective story without a single dialogue in it?). Thus, in
> pornographic novels, action has to be limited to the copulation of
> clichés. Style, structure, imagery should never distract the reader
> from his tepid lust. The novel must consist of an alternation of
> sexual scenes. The passages in between must be reduced to sutures
> of sense, logical bridges of the simplest design, brief expositions
> and explanations, which the reader will probably skip but must
> know they exist in order not to feel cheated (a mentality stemming
> from the routine of "true" fairy tales in childhood). Moreover, the

> sexual scenes in the book must follow a crescendo line, with new variations, new combinations, new sexes, and a steady increase in the number of participants (in a Sade play they call the gardener in), and therefore the end of the book must be more replete with lewd lore than the first chapters.[362]

In this paragraph, Nabokov is obviously frustrated that, in deliberately employing an erotic tone and mimicking the formula of a "lewd" book in order to stretch the boundaries of the novel in *Lolita*, it was assumed that his text belonged to the "pornography" category; despite the artistic originality, the unorthodox narration, and the sophisticated prose style, his manuscript was originally unsuccessful simply because *Lolita* was not a conventional serious novel (recall Eliot's requirements for "great and honoured" predecessors). And yet, ironically, *Lolita* was also unsuccessful as a "lewd" book because it also did not adhere to the standard requirements for the pornographic novel, not privileging sexual scenes over character development, or following the strict rules of its "crescendo" narration, and its language was too sophisticated for its audience. Thus, Nabokov had to wait awhile for the academy to catch up to his genius and, in writing this afterword, he expresses his concern that writers who experiment with literary boundaries should be so constrained: "No writer in a free country should be expected to bother about the exact demarcation between the sensuous and the sensual; this is preposterous…"[363] But what is most interesting about this passage is that its argument can be applied elsewhere. Let us play a little game of substitutions, shall we?:

> While it is true that in ancient Europe, and well into the eighteenth century (obvious examples come from [England]), deliberate

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[362] Ibid., 313.

[363] Ibid., 314.

[writing for children] was not inconsistent with flashes of comedy, or vigorous satire, or even the verve of a fine poet in a [whimsical] mood, it is also true that in modern times the term ["children's literature"] connotes mediocrity, commercialism, and certain strict rules of narration. [Writing for children] must be mated with banality because every kind of aesthetic enjoyment has to be entirely replaced by simple [narrative action] which demands the traditional word for direct action upon the patient. Old rigid rules must be followed by the [children's writer] in order to have his patient feel the same security of satisfaction as, for example, fans of detective stories feel—stories where, if you do not watch out, the real murderer may turn out to be, to the fan's disgust, artistic originality (who for instance would want a detective story without a single dialogue in it?). Thus, in [children's] novels, action has to be limited to the copulation of clichés. Style, structure, imagery should never distract the reader from his tepid [eagerness for action]. The novel must consist of an alternation of [action] scenes. The passages in between must be reduced to sutures of sense, logical bridges of the simplest design, brief expositions and explanations, which the reader will probably skip but must know they exist in order not to feel cheated (a mentality stemming from the routine of "true" fairy tales in childhood). Moreover, the [action] scenes in the book must follow a crescendo line, with new variations, new combinations, new [adventures], and a steady increase in the number of participants (in a [Barrie] play they call [another pirate] in), and therefore the end of the book must be more replete with [child] lore than the first chapters.

Though it could be argue that we are taking too many liberties with Nabokov's words, the situations between his novels and those of contemporary children's writers are actually similar. Contemporary children's fiction like *Harry Potter* has, like *Lolita*, one foot in two traditions and thus is struggling to find a place as a serious literature. But, also like *Lolita*, I believe this balancing act reveals sheer literary brilliance. In the pages that follow, I would like to demonstrate the way Rowling sets up expectations that her *Harry Potter* series will be a conventional work of children's fiction and then, like Nabokov, completely defies these expectations by creating something entirely unique and, yes, revolutionary.

The Genre Debate

As Perry Nodelman notes in *The Hidden Adult*, one of the key defining features of children's literature for the past two centuries has been a conventional focus on events and "narrative action based on a lack of details about characters and settings."[364] He argues that "the wish to show, rather than tell" results in less exposition, less character development, and a singular (usually childlike) point of view, thereby immediately demonstrating to the reader that the story is meant for children; moreover, it results in an identification of the genre with "a wide range of lacks and absences."[365] Hugo Crago, in his essay, *Children's Literature: On the Cultural Periphery*, also notes that "children's literature has in a sense taken over the tradition of fiction as primarily *narrative* experience."[366] As explained in Chapter One, in her essay *Children's Literature: Theory and Practice,* Felicity Hughes describes this event not so much as a 'take over', but as more of a consequence: the result of Henry James's influential arguments about the future of fiction. In the 1880s and 1890s, Henry James defined 'serious' (that is to indicate, *worthwhile*) adult fiction, as Nodelman puts it, "exactly in terms of its difference from what might be suitable reading for the less sophisticated minds of women and children."[367] In this way, the movement away from narrative in adult fiction was a deliberate act, necessary for the novel's acceptance as a significant category in the academy. Therefore, what Crago, Hughes, and Nodelman

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[364] Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*, 216.

[365] Ibid.

[366] Hugo Crago, "Children's Literature: On the Cultural Periphery," in *Signposts to Criticism of Children's Literature*, comp. Robert Bator (Chicago: American Library Association, 1983), 62.

[367] Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*, 215.

suggest is that children's literature remains apart from the mainstream of serious literature for adults because its defining attributes, such as its focus on narrative, represent its retention of qualities that adult fiction once had and from which it has moved away.[368] The exception to this rule in adult fiction is, of course, popular or genre adult fiction, which has preserved an emphasis on narrative at the expense of other literary elements and techniques, a retention that has contributed to its segregation from serious/literary adult literature.

As I proceed in this chapter to argue that contemporary children's literature does not privilege plot to the detriment of character development and detailed fictional landscape, I do not mean to say that the action and events that comprise the plot of the story are no longer a crucial aspect of literature for children. Nodelman argues, I think correctly, that a key marker of children's literature has been an adherence to conventional story patterns and that this retention of a strong narrative makes for an excellent children's book. But I do not agree that a strong narrative necessitates the deployment of other literary elements like exposition and character development in order to maintain the simplicity scholars claim is crucial to the genre's identity. Story is crucial to children's literature, yes, but why, to borrow Nabokov's words, should it be "mated with banality?" Why must action be limited to a "copulation of clichés," "logical bridges of the simplest design," "brief expositions and explanations?" Why must the narrative adhere to a simple formula to be a children's book? And, on the other hand, why must a serious work of literature reject a strong narrative to be considered sophisticated and complex? Shouldn't a strong narrative also be crucial to adult literary fiction? Aren't we ultimately moving away from the defining feature of the novel, that it can do "*everything*," if we reject its ability to vividly represent the actions and events

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[368] Ibid., 214.

that occur in the course of a life? In his Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech, Philip Pullman also addresses this problem:

> There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book. The reason for that is that in adult literary fiction, stories are there on sufferance. Other things are felt to be more important: technique, style, literary knowingness. Adult writers who deal in straightforward stories find themselves sidelined into a genre such as crime or science fiction, where no one expects literary craftsmanship.
>
> But stories are vital. Stories never fail us because, as Isaac Bashevis Singer says, "events never grow stale." There's more wisdom in a story than in volumes of philosophy. And by a story I mean not only Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk but also the great novels of the nineteenth century, Jane Eyre, Middlemarch, Bleak House and many others: novels where the story is at the center of the writer's attention, where the plot actually matters. The present-day would-be George Eliots take up their stories as if with a pair of tongs. They're embarrassed by them. If they could write novels without stories in them, they would. Sometimes they do.
>
> But what characterizes the best of children's authors is that they're not embarrassed to tell stories. They know how important stories are, and they know, too, that if you start telling a story you've got to carry on till you get to the end. And you can't provide two ends, either, and invite the reader to choose between them. Or as in a highly praised recent adult novel I'm about to stop reading, three different beginnings. In a book for children you can't put the plot on hold while you cut artistic capers for the amusement of your sophisticated readers, because, thank God, your readers are not sophisticated. They've got more important things in mind than your dazzling skill with wordplay. They want to know what happens next. [369]

Here, Pullman argues passionately not only that children's literature is right to value story, but also that the "great novels of the nineteenth century," in other words, the novels written before Henry James's criticism, also valued plot along with technique and style. But

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[369] Philip Pullman, Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech, 1996.

today, writers of novels for adults feel such pressure to be sophisticated and complex that

they sacrifice plot for presentation, resulting in works of literature that barely resemble an

interconnection in a series of ideas, let alone a novel. Consequently, their readers, who, like

Pullman, expected to read a *novel* bear a striking resemblance to the readers of *Lolita* who

expected *pornography*: both sets of readers feel misled, bored, and give up the book as a bad

job. I agree wholeheartedly with Pullman that story should be of high importance in a novel

and also that children's novels seem to have retained this element throughout the past

century while it was lost among the "artistic capers" cut by adult literature.

Pullman's statement that children are not sophisticated readers, however, is

erroneous. Nor, indeed, is it the case that contemporary children's literature lacks "dazzling

skill with wordplay." In fact, the enormous complexity and linguistic sophistication in

Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series belies this statement. Instead, Pullman here equates

'sophisticated' with 'highly educated' or 'elite.' Pullman does, in fact, believe children's

literature is sophisticated, just not falsely sophisticated, and this belief is revealed when he

continues his speech:

> There's a hunger for stories in all of us, adults too. We need
> stories so much that we're even willing to read bad books to get
> them, if the good books won't supply them. We all need stories, but
> children are more frank about it; cultured adults, on the other hand,
> those limp and jaded creatures who think it more important to
> seem sophisticated than to admit to simplicity, find it harder both
> to write and to read novels that don't come with a prophylactic
> garnish of irony.
> But those adults who truly enjoy story, and plot, and
> character, and who would like to find books in which the events
> matter and which at the same time are works of literary art where
> the writers have used all the resources of their craft, could hardly
> do better than to look among the children's books.[370]

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[370] Ibid.

Here Pullman claims that children's literature can, indeed, be a work of high art where writers not only give us a good story, but they use "all the resources of their craft," suggesting that these writers do give us detailed settings and character development, challenging vocabulary and syntax, as well as a seriousness of purpose. Therefore, what I believe to be the true target of Pullman's censure are those intellectualized, sanctimonious texts that reject any kind of authenticity or earnestness when telling their stories and instead hide behind their cultured prose and dispassionate points of view for fear of being labeled immature or guileless. This disinterestedness is disingenuous, like the feigned nonchalance of an eager suitor, secretly hoping to be singled out, deemed worthy, and prized above others. Thus, Pullman exhorts readers in search of great novels to peruse the children's section, because it is there that both great story and great art are free to converge.

In this next section, I demonstrate that contemporary children's fiction's power comes from the way it combines story and art by bringing together both the children's literature tradition and the tradition of the adult novel and the values to which they are allied. In this way, contemporary children's fiction is simultaneously creating something new, but also returning the novel to what it was intended to be: a way to represent the truths of the human experience. In his influential work, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye famously created a systematic study of literature. In the fourth essay that comprised his work, he theorized that the world of fiction was comprised of four genres (novel, romance, anatomy, and confession). Interestingly, his study is essentially free of value judgments and thus when he goes on to classify Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as a novel and *Wuthering Heights* as a romance, no genre is better than another. But Frye also describes the way each

genre rubs elbows with the others, sometimes incorporating another form. And, indeed, Frye seems most in awe of works of literature that are compound forms, like Melville's *Moby Dick* (romance-anatomy), Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (novel-anatomy-confession), and especially Joyce's *Ulysses* (novel-romance-anatomy-confession), which he calls "a complete prose epic." In this way, Frye's *Anatomy* is, perhaps surprisingly, applicable to this project which aims to efface the boundaries of literary fiction; employing Frye's system, we see that Rowling's novels are not merely the combination of "high culture" and "low culture," nor indeed are they simply a haphazard mélange of literary fiction and genre fiction. Instead, it becomes clear that by integrating techniques from a variety of different fictional forms, without privileging one above the other, *Harry Potter* is actually a consciously integrated work and not merely an aggregate of conventions.

Therefore, Rowling's novels, as well as Philip Pullman's trilogy, Catherynne Valente's series, and so many other books written for children at the turn of the twenty-first century, do not, as previous scholars like Nodelman claim, have more in common with popular literature than with the great literature of the past. Instead, they are the heralds of a new compound form, demonstrating a clear aesthetic philosophy and seriousness of purpose, while remaining committed to telling us a story in which the events really matter. In so doing, they show us that the novel is not an ossified institution, but a category in constant chrysalis, precisely what a novel *should* be.

Setting the (Magical) Scene: Beyond Mythopoeia

There are some critics, however, who are determined to see *Harry Potter* as the inheritor of only one literary form and are perturbed by its tendency to defy categorization.

One such critic is John Pennington, who in his 2002 article for *The Lion and the Unicorn*, "From Elfland to Hogwarts, or the Aesthetic Trouble with Harry Potter," states that "on aesthetic grounds, the series is fundamentally failed fantasy."[371] In defense of Pennington, when his article was written, Rowling had only completed four of her seven novels, so we might give him the benefit of the doubt when it comes to some of his assertions about the series, which are, alternately, hilariously indignant and affectedly derogatory[372]. Pennington sees *Harry Potter* as uniquely a work of fantasy literature, comparing Rowling's fiction to that of Tolkien, Lewis, and LeGuin. The exceptional works of fantasy fiction written by these three writers were able to skirt around the prevailing emphasis on realism during the second half of the twentieth century, creating remarkably intricate other-worlds into which their child readers were invited to immerse themselves. Pennington also makes it clear in his essay that these three writers in particular are the undisputed masters of the fantasy genre and that Rowling, in her failure to successfully imitate them, is consequently unsuccessful in her attempt to create a fantasy world.

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[371] John Pennington, "From Elfland to Hogwarts, or the Aesthetic Trouble with Harry Potter," *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Volume 26, Number 1, The Johns Hopkins University Press (January 2002), 78-97.

[372] It is at times unclear whether the article is a joke or if Pennington really missed the mark by so much. He uses the term "fuzzy set of influences" several times, which, perhaps unintentionally, reminds the reader of George W. Bush's "fuzzy math." It becomes especially confusing when he contradicts himself numerous times later in the essay. See for example: "More than with Tolkien, perhaps, Rowling follows in the tradition of C. S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*; once Harry and his friends enter the portal to an alternative world that is Platform Nine and Three-quarters, they are in the realm of Narnian influence, where children become self-sufficient and embark on perilous quests that help define their true character" (page 82) vs. "Harry and his friends have virtually no power; they are controlled and guided by the Hogwarts professors at virtually every stage of their quests" (page 90). Which does Pennington believe to be true, that Harry is self-sufficient or controlled by others? It remains unclear.

It seems to be her refusal to create a traditional fantasy mythopoeia that especially rankles. And, again, to be fair to Pennington, at first glance, Rowling's novels seem to belong completely to that tradition of texts. After all, like Tolkien's Middle Earth, with her wizarding world Rowling creates a fully operational Secondary World, complete with its own fantastical history, races, language, modes of transportation, and heroic fantasy plot. Like Lewis's Pevensie children, Harry finds that there are magical openings in his world that lead to another, secret universe where witches exist and sacrifices must be made. Like LeGuin's *Earthsea* books, there is a magical academy with wise wizards who help mold the protagonist into a hero. But the similarities, Pennington argues, end there. Pennington's article takes its title from LeGuin's 1973 essay, "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," in which LeGuin writes about the importance of style to create a sense of wonder and distance the fantasy world from the real world:

> A great many people [readers] want to go there [to Elfland],
> without knowing what it is they're looking for, driven by a vague
> hunger for something real. With the intention or under the
> pretense of obliging them, certain writers of fantasy are building
> six-lane highways and trailer parks with drive-in movies, so that
> the tourists can feel at home just as if they were back in
> Poughkeepsie."[373]

For LeGuin, fantasy must remove itself from the ordinary to be successful; the reader may want something real, but never realistic. Thus, for her *Earthsea* books, LeGuin created an

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[373] Ursula LeGuin, "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," *The Language of the Night* (New York: HarperCollins 1989), 79.

entirely self-contained fantasy world in the vein of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, what

Brian Attebery and Pennington designate "the center by which we judge other fantasies."[374]

And, indeed, it was especially J. R. R. Tolkien who, with his novels *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*, created perhaps the most elaborate artificial mythology or *mythopoeia* of all time. Mythopoeia is creative myth-making: it is both a narrative genre in which a fictional mythology is invented by a writer rather than evolving out of oral tradition, and it is also the *act* of creating mythologies (or making myth). Mythopoeia aims at imitating and sometimes including mythologies that have existed in a culture's reality, integrating traditional mythological themes and archetypes in order to give further credence to the created and creative myth. The fact that mythopoeia is extremely self-referential helps to bring literary depth and believability to worlds like Middle Earth. Attacked by C. S. Lewis who claimed myths were merely falsehoods, Tolkien infamously wrote the poem entitled *Mythopoeia* following a discussion with Lewis and Hugo Dyson at Magdalen College, Oxford on September 19, 1931 in order to explain the method of this new narrative genre as well as to defend its creation.[375] Calling himself Philomythus, Tolkien dedicated the poem to Lewis, whom he called Misomythus: "To one who said that myths were lies and therefore worthless, even though 'breathed through silver'." Though at the time he was skeptical of mythology and its usefulness, Lewis, like most of his fellow Inklings, eventually not only saw the worth in mythology and mythopoeia, but also even created a mythopoeia himself with his *Cosmic Trilogy* and than again with *The Chronicles*

[374] Pennington, "From Elfland to Hogwarts," 81.

[375] The discussion was recorded *The Inklings* a book by Humphrey Carpenter which details the club to which Lewis and Tolkien had membership.

of Narnia. However, Tolkien's mythopoeia about the world of Middle Earth is perhaps both

the most famous and most outstanding work of this kind because of its immense detail and

the incredible intricacy of his imagined world. Not only did Tolkien invent origin and

creation myths as well as write an epic poetry cycle that recounts another mythology that

exists *within* the greater mythopoeia, but he also created a meticulous geography and even

geology of the world, as well as a complete and operational fictive linguistics.[376] The world

of Middle Earth is thus incredibly complex and highly self-referential and has inspired a

huge following of academics and non-academics alike.[377] It is also completely self-

contained and separate from what Kathryn Hume calls "consensus reality"[378]; the world of

Middle Earth has no access point from the real world and neither does it resemble reality.

Thus, Tolkien follows his own rules about the "connexions of *fantasy* with *fantastic*: with

images of things that are not only 'not actually present,' but which are indeed not to be

found in our primary world at all, or are generally believed not to be found there."[379]

Therefore, when he examines Rowling's *Harry Potter* series as a pure fantasy text,

Pennington claims that there is a "disconnect between form and content."[380] For

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[376] Tolkien's fictive linguistics consists of the grammar and vocabulary of at least five Elvish dialects spanning three eras, the secret language of the Dwarves, the language of the Ents, the Valar language, the Orc language, plus the "black speech" created by the character Sauron for his empire. He also developed at least three languages of Man with their own grammar and vocabulary.

[377] A following so pervasive that it perhaps calls into question Alan Dundes's argument that "any novel cannot meet the cultural criteria of myth. A work of art, or artifice, cannot be said to be the narrative of a culture's sacred tradition… (it is) at most, artificial myth." Tell that to Stephen Colbert.

[378] Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis*: *Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 21.

[379] J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine, 1966), 47.

[380] Pennington, "From Elfland to Hogwarts," 79.

Pennington, LeGuin's words about Poughkeepsie are an "uncannily accurate prediction of

the Harry Potter phenomenon": "Pick up any of the Harry Potter books and you will be hit

with Poughkeepsie prose, not a style that generates the allure of Elfland."[381] He is absolutely

furious that Rowling, who he believes to be greatly "indebted" to Tolkien, should break the

master's rules:

> The rule bending/breaking in the Triwizard Tournament is a
> metaphor for Rowling's basic violation of fantasy literature ground
> rules—she violates the integral rules of the fantasy game, never
> capturing the integrity of the very fantasy tradition that she is
> mining for riches. And thus the aesthetic trouble with Harry
> Potter. […] On a fundamental level, Rowling is unwilling—or
> unable—to depart from this consensus reality; her novels, for all
> their "magical" trappings, are prefigured in mundane reality,
> relying too wholly on the real from which she simultaneously
> wants to escape.[382]

In a sense, Pennington is correct: while she does mine the fantasy tradition for riches,

Rowling does indeed also violate the "integral rules" of the fantasy game and refuse to

depart completely from consensus reality. But he is sorely mistaken in his assumptions

about her intentions and ultimate mission for her series: Rowling does not fail in her attempt

to recreate a mythopoeia like Middle Earth because *Harry Potter* was never intended to be a

pure fantasy text, nor does Rowling wish to escape from reality. Instead, the wizarding

world's intimate connection with the Muggle world is entirely intentional, and, what is

more, vital to the creation of a convincing and satisfying mythopoeia as well as a successful

novel. In these next few pages, I will argue that by making the wizarding world so

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[381] Ibid., 83.

[382] Ibid., 79.

proximate to the real world that the two often intersect and overlap, Rowling raises the stakes of mythopoeia and creates a text that expands the boundaries of fantasy fiction. In this way, contrary to Pennington's claims, Rowling both captures the integrity of the fantasy tradition and revitalizes it.

Rowling's world, like Tolkien's, Lewis's, and LeGuin's is indeed saturated with magical trappings, but, as Pennington points out, they are not always consistent with what are considered to be accepted components of "high fantasy." Hogwarts is partly inspired by the realistic British school story, with curricula and exams like Potions, Arithmancy, O.W.L.s, and N.E.W.T.s that replace chemistry, mathematics, O-level, and A-level examinations.   Additionally, instead of giving her characters swords, bows, or exquisite and impenetrable chain mail to admire and desire, Rowling instead provides her protagonists with wands, state-of-the-art brooms, and invisibility cloaks.[383] As we discussed in the previous section, like Tolkien, Rowling also creates a language for the wizarding world, but instead of making up a new base for her spell language she employs Latin, thus tethering magical speech to the roots of modern English speech. In this way, yes, Rowling's series deviates from previous fantasy fictions by closely aligning the fantastical/magical world with the real world. However, rather than simply promoting the commoditization of literature as Pennington would have us believe, Rowling grounds part of her mythopoeia in

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[383] For example, Pennington points to the Firebolt, a state-of-the-art racing broom that is used by Harry as well as Victor Krum (an international Quidditch player), as his example of one of the objects in Rowling's universe that ruins any possibility of the series being identified as a fantasy text. He calls Firebolt's "aura" of magic "parasitic, the host being conventional commodities in popular culture." Indeed, the Firebolt's advertisement is intentionally similar to an ad for a bicycle or a skateboard in the way that it is written because it is written to attract young wizard boys.

reality to serve a different purpose than her "high fantasy" predecessors. Rowling does not set out to create a work of fantasy fiction in which the secondary world is completely severed from reality. Rather, she uses these "realistic" magical accoutrements in order to distinguish her novel from traditional fantasy literature and create something new. Rather than repeat what has been done before, Rowling changes the fantasy tradition by making the Secondary World more proximate to reality in order to raise the stakes of her narrative. Her protagonists and, indeed, other protagonists in contemporary children's fiction like Pullman's Lyra, Valente's September, and Meloy's Prue McKeel, unlike their predecessors Frodo, Sam, Aragorn, Ged, or the Pevensie children, do not exist in or travel to a Secondary world where what happens has no effect upon the "real" world to which the reader belongs. Rather, in these new narratives, the fate of reality is tethered to the fate of the Secondary World. In this way, the works Rowling and her contemporaries recall some of the novels written in the Golden Age, like Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, where the otherworld encroaches upon reality. Therefore, the events that occur there may have a ripple effect and the dangers that the protagonists must face are uncomfortably close.

Contrarily, Pennington argues that the evil beings in Rowling's series—he uses the Dementors as his example—do not evoke the fear that evil beings in a traditional fantasy world inspire because they are not otherworldly enough and belong to a fantasy world that is too reliant on reality. Though Rowling's Dementors resemble similar creatures in high fantasy literature (like the Ringwraiths in Tolkien's series and the gebbeth from LeGuin's) Pennington claims that Rowling's description of Dementors has none of their power because it lacks a necessary estrangement from the ordinary. Here is Rowling's description, as told by Professor Lupin to Harry in his third year at Hogwarts:

> Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them. Even Muggles feel their presence, though they can't see them. Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the Dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself - soulless and evil. You'll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life. And the worst that has happened to you, Harry, is enough to make anyone fall off their broom. You have nothing to feel ashamed of.[384]

In his essay, Pennington then quotes a passage from LeGuin's *Earthsea* series where her protagonist, Ged, learns about gebbeths (humans or beings that have been consumed by power and are no longer themselves) from a teaching mage named Gensher as an example of creature that represents a "real danger" because it belongs to a pure fantasy world:

> Nothing protects you but the power of the Masters here and the defenses laid upon this island that keep the creatures of evil away. If you left now, the thing you loosed would find you at once, and enter into you, and possess you. You would be no man but a gebbeth, a puppet doing the will of that evil shadow which you raised up into the sunlight. You must stay here, until you gain strength and wisdom enough to defend yourself from it—if ever you do. Even now it waits for you. Assuredly it waits for you. Have you seen it since that night?[385]

In comparing Rowling with LeGuin, Pennington writes that except for the "foreign-sounding" *Dementor* and *Muggle,* Rowling's description could be "about gang members in some dangerous inner city, their 'sucking' of happy memories metaphoric rather than

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[384] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 140.

[385] LeGuin, "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," 65.

literal.'[386] He then claims that LeGuin's passage creates a "cadence of concern—[Gensher] speaks from Elfland, not from Poughkeepsie—and the style suggests a seriousness that is lacking in Rowling's example."[387] He continues, "There is a real danger in the LeGuin passage, the darkness of evil pitted against the sunlight of Ged, and Ged must undertake a horrible burden to defeat that evil, with much more serious potential than simply falling off a broomstick."[388]

Perhaps LeGuin's style is more Elfland-esque; the archaic gravitas of the phrases "the thing you loosed," "raised up into the sunlight," "if ever you do," "assuredly it waits," all intimate a world apart from that of the reader. But I would strongly disagree that the style of Rowling's passage is less serious or that there lacks a "real danger." Indeed, *is* there a "real danger" in LeGuin's story? Regardless of whether or not these creatures are terrifying (they are), even for Ged the danger of the gebbeth is not immediate. It is true that the gebbeth could hunt him down if Ged left the island, but instead, in this moment, he is safe, protected by both distance and his powerful guardians. Additionally, Gensher tells Ged that even if he does leave the island one day, he may still be able to defend himself from the gebbeth, once he has gained "strength and wisdom." The same cannot be said for Harry, who, at this point in the novel, has already twice encountered the Dementors which, in this book, have breached both the Hogwarts Express and the castle grounds despite the protection of powerful wizards like Lupin and Dumbledore. As Pennington mentions, Harry does indeed fall from his broom when he encounters the Dementors for the second time, but

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[386] Pennington, "From Elfland to Hogwarts," 83.

[387] Ibid., 84.

[388] Ibid., 84.

Pennington conveniently forgets to describe that when Harry falls, it is from a fifty-foot height, and he could have died from his injuries. But most importantly, what Pennington does not tell his reader is that the reason for Harry's fall is because the Dementors force Harry to relive the murder of his parents, hearing their screams and pleas for mercy, a memory so painful and terrifying that it causes him to faint. Thus, in Rowling's series, the dangers of the Secondary World are so near at hand that they can attack at any moment.

What is more, while the being who once owned the body being possessed by the gebbeth may be reversed back to the body, this is not possible once the Dementor has successfully defeated a victim. For a victim of the Dementor, there is no return, as Professor Lupin tells Harry later in the same installment:

> 'What's under a Dementor's hood?'
> Professor Lupin lowered his bottle thoughtfully.
> 'Hmmm … well, the only people who really know are in no condition to tell us. You see, the Dementor only lowers its hood to use its last and worst weapon.'
> 'What's that?'
> 'They call it the Dementor's Kiss,' said Lupin, with a slightly twisted smile. 'It's what Dementors do to those they wish to destroy utterly. I suppose there must be some kind of mouth under there, because they clamp their jaws upon the mouth of the victim and – and suck out his soul.'
> Harry accidentally spat out a bit of Butterbeer.
> 'What – they kill –?'
> 'Oh, no,' said Lupin. 'Much worse than that. You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self any more, no memory, no … anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just – exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever … lost.'[389]

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[389] Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 183.

Here, Rowling's style, with its halting rhythm, its accruing adjectives, and the urgency underlined by Harry's interruptions, emphasizes how near the danger of Dementors is to Harry and, indeed, the rest of her characters. Additionally, the description of the Dementor's kiss, with its "jaws" that "clamp" around the "mouth" of the victim and "suck" out his soul is violent that it provokes a visceral reaction in Harry, who, in his horror, does just the opposite of the Dementor's kiss and spits out his drink. Here, I believe Rowling's choice to use the word "kiss" to be purposeful. An ordinary action and a sign of affection, a kiss is something that her readers can easily imagine. Thus, when it is here completely altered, the violence of the Dementor's Kiss is more keenly felt, both by Harry and his reader. And, unlike the gebbeth's takeover of the body, the Dementor's kiss does irrevocable damage, leaving the victim forever in a vegetative state.

Additionally, not only is the danger near-at-hand for Harry, but in the previous passage Lupin also tells us that Muggles can be affected by Dementors, even if they cannot see them (which in and of itself is a terrifying thought). And, indeed, in *Order of the Phoenix* a Dementor attacks not only Harry but also his Muggle cousin, Dudley, and attempts to suck out Dudley's soul. In *Half-Blood Prince*, the Prime Minister of Great Britain takes a meeting with Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge in which he learns that the Dementors, who have abandoned their posts at the wizard prison, Azkaban, have now joined forces with Voldemort. Much to the Prime Minister's dismay, he also finds out that because there has been so much destruction and sadness in both the Muggle and wizarding worlds, that the Dementors are able to breed, producing a mist covering the countryside which is so thick that it is visible to Muggles. Thus, Rowling emphasizes that Dementors are not only a threat to wizards, but also to ordinary human beings like the reader. In this way, Rowling

expands the boundaries of pure or high fantasy fiction by introducing a being which grounds itself in the fantastic through its identity, but whose effect suggests a real danger outside the confines of the secondary world.

By "breaking the rules" of conventional fantasy fiction, Rowling suggests that there should no longer exist such a clear distinction between fantasy fiction and realistic fiction. This blurred boundary is also indicated by the complex history that grounds Harry's story. Like Narnia, Rowling's wizarding world exists in secret alongside the ordinary Muggle world, but Rowling takes considerable trouble to make its presence possible. Indeed, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Rowling's universe is that its existence seems extremely plausible. She, like so many of her predecessors (cf. C. S. Lewis, Jules Feiffer, L. Frank Baum, P.L. Travers, and of course, J. M. Barrie and Lewis Carroll) employs the narrative trope of crossing portals[390] in order to access the magical world. Her portals do not come and go, however, like the Narnia wardrobe or the cyclone, but rather are built into the real world as permanent fixtures that are magically concealed. For example, Number 12 Grimmauld Place is a permanent structure that exists in the real world, as evidenced by the gap in the numbering of the other houses on the street. Though the Muggles are confused by what they believe to be an idiosyncrasy or a mistake that makes Number 13 follow Number 11, there does exist another house in between that has been concealed by both a concealment charm (presumably cast by one of the Blacks, who notoriously hated Muggles and thus would never wish to be seen by their neighbors) as well as the Fidelius Charm, cast by

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[390] This also happens with Lyra, Haroun, and Coraline.

Dumbledore. Additionally, Platform 9 ¾ in Kings Cross Station has an elaborate mythology

that creates a convincing justification of its presence in a Muggle railway station[391]:

> …it remained the responsibility of parents to convey their children to school, right up until the imposition of the International Statute of Secrecy in 1692. At this point, it became a matter of urgency to find some more discreet method of transporting hundreds of wizarding children from all over Britain to their secret school in the Highlands of Scotland.
> […]
> A daring and controversial solution to the thorny problem [getting children to and from Hogwarts School in secrecy] was finally suggested by Minister for Magic Ottaline Gambol, who was much intrigued by Muggle inventions and saw the potential in trains. Where exactly the Hogwarts Express came from has never been conclusively proven, although it is a fact that there are secret records at the Ministry of Magic detailing a mass operation involving one hundred and sixty-seven Memory Charms and the largest ever mass Concealment Charm performed in Britain. The morning after these alleged crimes, a gleaming scarlet steam engine and carriages astounded the villagers of Hogsmeade (who had also not realised they had a railway station), while several bemused Muggle railway workers down in Crewe spent the rest of the year grappling with the uncomfortable feeling that they had mislaid something important.
> The Hogwarts Express underwent several magical modifications before the Ministry approved it for school use. Many pure-blood families were outraged at the idea of their children using Muggle transport, which they claimed was unsafe, insanitary and demeaning; however, as the Ministry decreed that students either rode the train or did not attend school, the objections were swiftly silenced.[392]

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[391] This mythology is so tied to the real world that the city of London actually installed a Platform 9 ¾ in Kings Cross Station that has become one of the most visited tourist attractions for children and adults in the city.

[392] Rowling, *Pottermore*, Book 1, Chapter 6, "The Hogwarts Express," https://www.pottermore.com/en-us/.

Here, with Minister of Magic Ottaline Gambol's solution to the transportation problem, Rowling creates a magical portal grounded in reality by tying together wizarding history with Muggle history: Gambol's term of office occurred from 1827-1835, closely coinciding with the construction of the first public railways in Britain. In this passage, Rowling also references the way she rationalizes the minimal knowledge Muggles have of the wizarding world by creating a highly complex history in which the wizarding community debated and eventually opted for concealment. During Harry's lifetime, not only is there an International Statute of Secrecy, a law signed in 1689 and then established officially in 1692 by the International Confederation of Wizards, which insists that witches and wizards hide their existence for their own protection, but there is also a Ministry of Magic department whose main job, as Cornelius Fudge tells us, is to "keep it secret from the Muggles." Additionally, there is a specific spell (*Obliviate*) employed by Ministry of Magic workers known as Obliviators whose job it is to erase any memory a Muggle might have of an encounter with wizards. For example, in Book Four, when the campground manager Mr. Roberts and his family are tortured by Death Eaters, a team of Obliviators is sent to modify their memories so that they do not remember the incident. In this way, Rowling rationalizes the existence of wizards living in secret among us, but, what is more, she also ties together wizard and Muggle history.

We learn from Rowling that The International Statute of Secrecy was established in the same year that the Salem Witch Trials were occurring in New England. Additionally, the decision to institute such a law was influenced by wizards' historical interaction with Muggles. We learn from Dumbledore's notes on "The Wizard and the Hopping Pot" in *Tales of Beedle the Bard* that:

The persecution of witches and wizards was gathering pace all over Europe in the early fifteenth century. Many in the magical community felt, and with good reason, that offering to cast a spell on the Muggle-next-door's sickly pig was tantamount to volunteering to fetch the firewood for one's own funeral pyre. [1] 'Let the Muggles manage without us!' was the cry, as the wizards drew further and further apart from their non-magical brethren, culminating with the institution of the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy in 1689, when wizardkind voluntarily went underground. […] As the witch-hunts grew ever fiercer, wizarding families began to live double lives, using charms of concealment to protect themselves and their families. By the seventeenth century, any witch or wizard who chose to fraternise with Muggles became suspect, even an outcast in his or her own community. Among the many insults hurled at pro-Muggle witches and wizards (such fruity epithets as "Mudwallower', 'Dunglicker' and 'Scumsucker' date from this period), was the charge of having weak or inferior magic.

Influential wizards of the day, such as Brutus Malfoy, editor of *Warlock at War*, an anti-Muggle periodical, perpetuated the stereotype that a Muggle-lover was about as magical as a Squib. In 1675, Brutus wrote:

> *This we may state with certainty: any wizard who shows fondness for the society of Muggles is of low intelligence, with magic so feeble and pitiful that he can only feel himself superior if surrounded by Muggle pigmen.*
>
> *Nothing is a surer sign of weak magic than a weakness for non-magical company.*[393]

[1] It is true, of course, that genuine witches and wizards were reasonably adept at escaping the stake, block and noose (see my comments about Lisette de Lapin in the commentary on 'Babbitty Rabbitty and her Cackling Stump'). However, a number of deaths did occur: Sir Nicolas de Mimsy-Porpington (a wizard at the royal court in his lifetime, and in his death-time, ghost of Gryffindor Tower) was stripped of his wand before being locked in a dungeon, and was unable to magic himself out of his execution; and wizarding families were particularly prone to losing younger members, whose inability to control their own magic made them noticeable, and vulnerable, to Muggle witch-hunters.

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[393] J. K. Rowling, *Tales of Beedle the Bard* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 13-16.

In this passage, Rowling creates a complete history behind the law that will affect

Harry's life and education. Not only is this mythology bolstered by the creation of

"historical" characters like Sir Nicolas, Lisette de Lapin, and Brutus Malfoy, but Rowling

also references the origin of the derogatory terms for Muggles, forerunners of the highest

insult, "Mudblood," that will appear and influence the politics and ideals of Harry Potter and

his contemporaries. Additionally, by establishing a history in which there were wizards

whose vehement opposition to the law eventually led to the underlying prejudice against

Muggle-born wizards, Rowling introduces the mythology behind an issue that becomes

crucial to the *Harry Potter* series: racial prejudice. Her introduction of this history also

helps to illuminate the personalities and choices of several of Rowling's main characters,

namely Lucius, Narcissa, and Draco Malfoy, Bellatrix Lestrange, and, of course, Tom

Riddle/Lord Voldemort. Rowling tells us that these characters' deep hatred of Muggles

began soon after the Statute of Secrecy's institution. [394] In this way, Rowling's mythopoeia

imitates Tolkien's, which rationalizes Gimli's and Legolas's initial mistrust of one another

by establishing the long enmity that existed between Elves and Dwarves through the

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[394] Rowling writes on Pottermore: "Historically, the Malfoys drew a sharp distinction between poor Muggles and those with wealth and authority. Until the imposition of the Statute of Secrecy in 1692, the Malfoy family was active within highborn Muggle circles, and it is said that their fervent opposition to the imposition of the Statute was due, in part, to the fact that they would have to withdraw from this enjoyable sphere of social life. Though hotly denied by subsequent generations, there is ample evidence to suggest that the first Lucius Malfoy was an unsuccessful aspirant to the hand of Elizabeth I, and some wizarding historians allege that the Queen's subsequent opposition to marriage was due to a jinx placed upon her by the thwarted Malfoy. With that healthy degree of self-preservation that has characterised most of their actions over the centuries, once the Statute of Secrecy had passed into law the Malfoys ceased fraternising with Muggles, however well-born, and accepted that further opposition and protests could only distance them from the new heart of power: the newly created Ministry of Magic. They performed an abrupt volte-face, and became as vocally supportive of the Statute as any of those who had championed it from the beginning, hastening to deny that they had ever been on speaking (or marrying) terms with Muggles."

descriptions of the battles, wars, and mishandled treaties/laws that occurred between the two races throughout the history of Middle Earth.

However, unlike Tolkien whose Middle Earth is removed from reality by being an isolated fantasy world, Rowling's mythopoeia overlaps with the events of the real world, each influencing the other. This overlapping worlds-view is consistent throughout all seven of her novels, though in the last four novels we see more evidence of the proximity of fantasy and the real. This becomes especially apparent in regards to the politics of each world. For example, Dumbledore's defeat of the Dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald occurs in 1945, the year of the Allies defeat of Hitler's regime.[395] Suggested in this intersection is the reciprocal interaction of the two worlds; the end of Grindelwald's reign of terror coincided with the downfall of Hitler's regime because the two worlds were intimately intertwined at that point, both in turmoil due to the tyranny of a prejudiced and power-hungry dictator. During this time, Grindelwald adopted an ancient symbol (the sign of the Deathly Hallows) as his sigil, which, like the manji-turned-swastika for Hitler, represented his power. Additionally, above the entrance to his fortress Nurmengard hung a sign that read "For the Greater Good," which corresponds to the sign above Auschwitz "Arbeit Macht Frei," further tying the goals of each regime together (Grindelwald's target was primarily Muggles, considering them to be beneath wizards in wisdom and power, though he also notoriously hated and murdered Muggle-borns and "blood-traitors," or those with Muggle sympathies; Hitler targeted Jews, Communists, and marginalized communities like gypsies, gays, and the

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[395] After Grindelwald's defeat, he was imprisoned in his own fortress of Nurmengard until his death in 1998, an event that bears resemblance not only to Saruman's initial confinement at Orthanc, but also the fate of Rudolph Hess, a Nazi who was imprisoned in Spandau from 1966 until his death in 1987.

mentally infirm). In this way, Rowling intimates that the actions and events that occur in the wizarding world not only replicate what occurs in reality, but can actually influence reality. In this way, she raises the stakes of mythopoeia by creating a believable fantasy realm whose future is intimately intertwined in our own.

Consequently, during the time span of the *Harry Potter* novels, when the politics of Rowling's wizarding world become volatile and its future becomes uncertain, the reader is aware that the danger of the secondary, fantasy world may impact reality. And, indeed, especially in Books 4, 5, 6, and 7, the wizarding world begins to encroach on the real world as the effects of Lord Voldemort's return are felt by the Muggles. In Book 4, Death Eaters attack a Muggle family on the night of the Quidditch World Cup; in Book 5, Harry's cousin Dudley is attacked by Dementors; in Book 6, we learn from the Muggle Prime Minister that there have been several causalities as the result of a fallen bridge (blown up by Death Eaters), a hurricane in the West Country which destroyed land as well as injured many (again, the work of Death Eaters), and several mysterious murders. One of these murders was of an entire Muggle family, and we are told by Lupin that the Muggles believe this to be the result of a gas leak, but in actuality it was the *Avada Kedavra* curse cast by a Dark wizard. By demonstrating to the reader that these supposedly accidental deaths and catastrophes could be the result of magical activity, Rowling makes us question our security in the real world and simultaneously underlines the realism of her fantasy world. Therefore, the wizarding world is not meant to be an escape from reality, but rather a fantastic extension of reality.

In this way, by tethering her mythopoeia to reality, Rowling consciously creates a work of fiction that goes beyond the conventional boundaries of fantasy fiction for children.

Additionally, though the magical components are grounded within the real and are convincingly rationalized by the mutually dependent histories of the wizarding and real worlds, by virtue of their "magic," these novels cannot be considered traditional realistic fiction for children. As a result, by nesting imagination within the rationality of the material world, Rowling is free from both the constraints of superficial realism as well as the constraints of superficial fantasy, and therefore creates a novel that is a hybrid of both traditions. In this way, Rowling refuses to privilege the fantasy world above the real world as do so many of her fantasy fiction predecessors, but neither does she allow the Muggle world to take precedence and permit the wizarding world to become an escape for Harry. Instead, both worlds are alternately a place of refuge for Rowling's protagonists. For example, though Harry is relieved to be admitted to Hogwarts in the first book and thrilled to return there in the next five installments in order to escape the tyranny of his Muggle relatives, his attitude shifts as the novels progress. In Book 5, when Professor Umbridge takes control of the school, Harry is hard pressed to decide whether he prefers the wizarding world to his life at Number 4 Privet Drive. Additionally, in Book 7, when the Ministry has fallen into the hands of Lord Voldemort, Harry, Ron, and Hermione seek refuge in the Muggle world. By integrating her Secondary World into the history and very materiality of the real world, as well as never permitting *Harry Potter* to become escapist fantasy fiction, Rowling changes the rules of what constitutes a mythopoeic text. And while Rowling's wizarding world and our Muggle world may be the most intimately connected, many other contemporary writers for children also write high fantasy texts in which their fantasy worlds do not remain separated from reality. Notable examples are Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, and Catherynne Valente's *Fairyland* series,

particularly the first two installments, *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making* and *The Girl Who Fell Beneath Fairyland and Led the Revels There*.

In *Coraline*, Gaiman's protagonist finds a doorway to a Secondary World that appears to be an exact replica of her reality. Believing this place to be an escape from the boredom of her own house, Coraline is thrilled to find her "Other" mother and father who do not ignore or scold her, but rather make her the cherished center of their lives. However, when she returns to her "real" home and finds her parents have vanished, the fantasy world literally begins to show its seams and Coraline begins to suspect that her Other mother's devotion has a more sinister motive. In this novel, what happens in the Secondary World has an adverse effect on the real world; the two are linked not only by the portal, but also by history. Coraline is not the first child living in this house who found the key to the Other world, and by rescuing herself she also rescues the souls of the Other mother's previous victims.

Catherynne Valente's *Fairyland* series is representative of yet another version of this symbiotic relationship between real world and Secondary world, and, in her series, Valente further complicates this relationship by adding a third world. In the first installment, *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*, Valente's protagonist September is whisked off to Fairyland where she has numerous adventures and where she sacrifices her shadow, severing it from her body in a moment reminiscent of *Peter Pan* (but definitely less comical), to save another child. Unlike the Pevensies who return physically untouched, their youth regained, after their foray into Narnia, when September returns to the real world her shadow is not magically returned to her, a fact that becomes important in the second installment. In *The Girl Who Fell Beneath Fairyland and Led the Revels There*,

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September's shadow, Halloween the Hollow Queen, who is the physically and emotionally

"dark" version of September, has taken over Fairyland-Below and is stealing the shadows

from the beings in Fairyland-Above and refusing to give them back. What is interesting

about Valente's two fantasy worlds is their vital interconnectedness. Neither the Secondary

World (Fairyland) nor the Tertiary World (Fairyland-Below) is privileged above the other,

and, in fact, both are mutually dependent. Valente explains this connection in a dialogue

between September and her friend A-Through-L or Ell, a wyverary:

> "Ever seen a mushroom?" Ell said, flexing his shadowy claws.
> "Of course!"
> "No, you haven't. You've seen a little polka-dotted cap or an
> oystery bit of fungusy lace. What a mushroom *is*, what it really
> looks like, is a whole mad tangle of stuff spreading underground
> for miles and miles, tendrils and whorls and loops of stem and
> mold and spore. Well, Fairyland-Below isn't separate from
> Fairyland at all. It is our cap. Underneath, we grow forever
> secretly outward, tangling in complicated loops, while what you
> see in the forest is really little more than a nose poking out."[396]

In this series, Otherworlds are deeply connected, each affecting and influencing the other.

The shadow world is dependent upon Fairyland to survive, but so, too, does Fairyland

depend upon Fairyland-Below to provide roots for its magic. Ell explains to September that

shadows are the origins of Fairyland's magic and that Fairyland-Below is both the shadow

of Fairyland and its root, the place where "magic gets born and grows up and sows its oats

before coming out into the world. The body does the living; the shadow does the

dreaming."[397] But this mutuality is threatened when September's shadow intends to destroy

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[396] Catherynne Valente, *The Girl Who Fell Beneath Fairyland and Led the Revels There* (New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2012), 59-60.

[397] Ibid., 60.

Fairyland in order for Fairyland-Below to become an independent, separate country/world and gain more magic. Most importantly, Halloween wishes to destroy Fairyland in order to shift Fairyland-Below's position: because the worlds are stacked on top of each other, she wishes to dissolve Fairyland so that Fairyland-Below's borders will touch the real world so as to be able to more easily steal shadows from it. And there is yet another complication to this interconnection: Halloween's desire to sever the two worlds is motivated by her desire to reunite her family. In the real world, September's father has been separated from September and her mother because he is a soldier in the Second World War. In the course of her adventures in Fairyland-Below, September discovers that Halloween's henchman, the Alleyman[398], who is helping Halloween steal the shadows, is actually the shadow of her own father. Halloween explains to September that she found a hole between worlds and saw their father fighting in the water of a French river: "He was fighting and his leg had broken, like ours did, do you remember? I took a deep breath and I grabbed him. I just reached through the hole in the river and I grabbed his shadow and pulled him through."[399] September's father further explains the connections between the worlds by describing how his dreams affected his reality:

> "I'd been reading the books we found in an old woman's house near Strasbourg. All fairy stories and old tales. One was about a Lutin—an invisible spirit who wore a red hat with two feathers. A house-spirit, who protected a home and made it safe. When she pulled me through, I was still thinking about how nice it would seem to be invisible, to be able to pass through the lines without

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[398] September's father is called the Alleyman in Fairyland-Below because, when he was pulled through the hole between Germany and the Fairylands, he was initially so confused that he kept shouting "Les Allemands viennent! Les Allemands viennent!" and the citizens of Fairyland-Below began to call him the Alleyman because he said it so often. (242)

[399] Valente, *The Girl Who Fell Beneath Fairyland and Led the Revels There*, 241-242.

being seen. Then all of a sudden, I *was* invisible, and I had a red
hat. Everything had changed. And my daughter was here, as if by
magic—at least, something like my daughter. A shadow, like I am
a shadow. Like we are all shadows down here. But at least I could
hold her, and talk to her. She said it happened because I wanted it
so much my wanting turned into magic, only when she said *want*
the word seemed so much bigger than I imagined it could be. And
she told me to take everyone's shadows. I thought she was mad,
and so cruel—how could I have raised such a cruel girl as that?
But she said if I took all the shadows, everything would come
rushing together, this world and Nebraska. And I thought, *Maybe
then I could go home*. I could go home to my real daughter and my
wife …"[400]

In this passage, Valente demonstrates how September's father's experiences in France and

his wishes regarding his family influence what happens in Fairyland. Because he imagines

being able to pass through the front lines of battle without being noticed by the enemy,

September's father is able to pass through the portal into Fairyland-Below.   Additionally,

because he wishes to be like the Lutin, protecting his home and making it safe, he finds his

daughter in Fairyland-Below and becomes her protector, even donning a red hat. The

Alleyman's actions in Fairyland-Below are connected to September's father's real desire to

return safely home to Nebraska from the trenches in France. What is more, Valente also

plays with identity in this passage, connecting the Alleyman (September's father's shadow)

to her real father, they are two people in two different worlds, yet dependent upon each other

for existence. After September and Halloween return the shadows to Fairyland, September

is magically returned home to Nebraska holding the Alleyman's hand. As they walk toward

September's house, they have a conversation that, again, confuses the boundary between

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[400] Ibid., 242-243.

real world and Secondary (or, in this case, Tertiary) World and demonstrates their mutual

dependency:

> "Is that home?" her father's shadow said. "Is it really home?"
> "Yes, Papa. It's home. Mother's there, and good coffee, and our old dog by the fire. I've brought you all the way home." She did so want him to be proud of her.
> "It was worth it, then. All the things I've done."
> "Don't think about that, Papa."
> Her father's shadow looked sadly down at her. "You can never forget what you do in a war, September my love. No one can. You won't forget your war either."
> They began to walk toward the house, though September dragged her feet. She wanted to savor this last moment with her father, for of course this was only a shadow. Her father's body was still fighting in France, and once they got to the house she'd be fatherless again.[401]

Here, with the line "It was worth it, then. All the things I've done," Valente connects the

Alleyman's actions to things September's father did during the war in order to protect his

country, and thus his home and family. His actions in Fairyland, Fairyland-Below, and

reality are, in this way, fused into one memory and one experience. Finally, Valente further

demonstrates the intimate connection between worlds and identities when, contrary to what

September expects in the passage above, she and her father's shadow reach the house to find

that her wounded father has been returned home from the war.

Finally, Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, like Valente's series, operates under

the assumption that there are multiple worlds and that they are intimately connected. In the

second installment of this series, we learn that what we thought was a separate and

segregated fantasy world like Middle Earth in *Northern Lights* is actually a Secondary

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[401] Ibid., 256.

World to another fictional reality. When Lyra's father, Lord Asriel, a champion of the multiple worlds theory, finally succeeds in creating a tear in the fabric of his own world and crosses into another, the citizens of Lyra's world are forced to acknowledge that theirs is not the only reality. In the course of her adventures, Lyra discovers that there is another Oxford than the one in which she grew up, an Oxford that exists in Will's and the reader's reality. Additionally, there are thousands of other worlds that exist on top of each other, like a great pile of transparent maps through which other maps are visible. Pullman demonstrates the crucial relationship among all worlds when Lyra sets out to save Roger's soul: when she and Will use the subtle knife to cut through to the Underworld of all worlds, Lyra finds that all souls, regardless of their world of origin, are sent to the World of the Dead. Additionally, when Lyra and Will cut an opening in the World of the Dead so that the souls can be released into the atmosphere, Pullman intimates that the fate of every world is connected, and that by cutting this opening, Lyra frees every human being from every world, from the tyranny of death. In this way, like Rowling, Pullman, Gaiman, and Valente create otherworlds that are intimately connected with the reality of the child reader, suggesting that contemporary fictions for children do not have to choose between the real and the marvelous to tell a successful story.

Part III
Kings Cross(roads): Reimagining the Hero in Children's Literature

Chapter Six
Forming an Old Acquaintance

In this chapter, Rowling departs from several of the key defining markers that Perry Nodelman claimed were crucial to the genre. In contemporary texts for children like J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels, writers are complicating the simple and recognizable story patterns that have typified the category and, by doing so, they are shifting the focus of their novels to the creation of believable and complex characters. While writers like Rowling indeed exploit some of the motifs and story structures that have typified narratives in the children's literature category, they are no longer primarily preoccupied with action and events. Instead, the more sophisticated structure of the plots underwrites character revelation.

In your modesty you seem to consider that writers are of different blood and bone from yourselves; that they know more of Mrs. Brown than you do. Never was there a more fatal mistake. It is this division between reader and writer, this humility on your part, these professional airs and graces on ours, that corrupt and emasculate the books which should be the healthy offspring of a close and equal alliance between us. Hence spring those sleek, smooth novels, those portentous and ridiculous biographies, that milk and watery criticism, those poems melodiously celebrating the innocence of roses and sheep which pass so plausibly for literature at the present time.
-Virginia Woolf[402]

Twenty-four years after Henry James wrote "The Future of the Novel," Virginia Woolf wrote "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923), another essay that contemplated the fate of English literature. Interestingly, while there are similarities between her essay and James's in their commitment to challenging the boundaries of the novelistic genre, Woolf's suggested methods by which the novel could achieve greatness and demonstrate the truths about the human experience came from a different angle. Less concerned about a common audience and the thematic reticence it involves, Woolf, in her essay, targets the means by

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[402] Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," (Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1978), 23.

which writers in the early twentieth century privileged style and technique over character description. The novel in 1923, Woolf attests, was "trembling on the verge of one of the great ages," but its future was dependent upon how it treated its characters. Woolf regarded the Edwardian period of English literature as a time of great change in the novel[403] when there was a concentrated effort for stylistic sophistication and highly detailed representation of external reality. In her essay, while she allows that this concentration on style and form was the next necessary step for the novel after what she terms "the creative activity of the Victorian age," she also argues that this method undermined the development and representation of complex, believable characters. She writes:

> That is what I mean by saying that the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use. They have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there. To give them their due, they have made that house much better worth living in. But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it.[404]

Here Woolf acknowledges that the writers in the previous generation made great strides in expanding the boundaries of the novel with their excessive pedantry and attention to detail, but, for her, the house of fiction was not complete without an accurate and convincing portrayal of the fictional characters who lived within it; consequently, for Woolf, it was only through characterization that the novel could achieve verisimilitude.

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[403] In her essay, Woolf though she agrees with Arnold Bennett's claims that the novel is in crisis due to the Georgian novelists' failure in "character-making," she locates the origins of this failure in Bennett's own Edwardian generation of novelists. She states that the novel changed in 1910.

[404] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 18.

"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" was written as a response to Arnold Bennett, who claimed that there were no great novelists during the Georgian period of English literature because of their failure to create characters that are real, true, and convincing. But Woolf explains that even in Bennett's own Edwardian era writers fell short in creating believable characters because they were more interested in reflecting the human condition by some other method:

> With all his powers of observation, which are marvellous, with all his sympathy and humanity, which are great, Mr. Bennett has never once looked at Mrs. Brown in her corner. There she sits in the corner of the carriage—that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out—there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature. And so they have developed a technique of novel-writing which suits their purpose; they have made tools and established conventions which do their business. But those tools are not our tools, and that business is not our business. For us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death.[405]

With this passage, Woolf explains that the portrayal of Mrs. Brown, or, in other words, the representation of human nature, is not peripheral to novel, but is one of its constitutive elements. Therefore, though Woolf's declaration that the conventions of the Edwardians would result in the death of the novel may seem a bit hyperbolic, she strove to stress the way the novel absolutely could not achieve verisimilitude by privileging other goals (such as, for instance, moralism, social reform, sophisticated style, etc.) at the expense of

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[405] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 16.

characterization. Woolf believed that characterization was not a literary technique to be arbitrarily sidelined or highlighted depending upon the writer's whim, but rather a crucial element of the genre upon which the very definition and success of the novel depended. Therefore, like Henry James before her, and like Vladimir Nabokov and Philip Pullman after her, Woolf argued that the novel was not living up to its potential.

To a certain degree, I believe Woolf's observations about the novel in the Georgian period can be applied to the twentieth-century children's novel. As I have explained in Chapter Two, the concentration on narrative and preoccupation with action and events at the expense of character development is true of most of the children's fiction written during the twentieth century. For Perry Nodelman, the two go hand in hand: this focus on events rather than description or character revelation is "characteristic" and actually "define[s] the style" of the category.[406] In *The Hidden Adult*, he suggests that children's literature's repetition of simple and familiar narrative plots represents "a retention of a quality that adult fiction (except, of course, popular literature) once had and has moved away from."[407] In this way, for Nodelman and for other critics like Hugh Crago, Charles Temple, and Peter Brooks,[408] children's literature is by its definition less complex than adult literature. Nodelman argues that children's literature's preoccupation with this more simplistic kind of narration and rejection of complex characterization represents something that it shares with what he calls "a less evolved state of adult literature" and, therefore, becomes evidence of "its

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[406] Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*, 214.

[407] Ibid., 214-215.

[408] See, for example, Hugh Crago's essay "Children's Literature: On the Cultural Periphery," in Robert Bator's *Signposts to Criticism of Children's Literature*, or Peter Brooks's essay "Toward Supreme Fictions" in *The Child's Part* (ed. Peter Brooks)

appropriateness as literature for a less evolved form of humanity."[409] He writes, "In terms of how the genre of children's literature fits into literature as a whole, it is not merely different—it is inherently and by definition less evolved."[410]

I agree with Perry Nodelman that a focus on action and events as well as the retention of simplistic and familiar story patterns indeed precludes the representation or revelation of complex and believable characters. However, on a more promising note, in this chapter I argue that contemporary children's literature is changing its focus and, in this way, changing its definition. In contemporary texts for children like J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels, writers are complicating the simple and recognizable story patterns that have typified the category and, by doing so, they are shifting the focus of their novels to the creation of believable and complex characters. While writers like Rowling indeed exploit some of the motifs and story structures that have typified narratives in the children's literature category, they are no longer primarily preoccupied with action and events. Instead, the more sophisticated structure of the plots underwrites character revelation. Instead of subordinating characterization to narrative fictionalizing, which Peter Brooks claims is the way most children's literature texts operate, the story no longer does all the work.[411] Interestingly, contemporary writers for children have adopted the methods by which Woolf declared that the novel could achieve verisimilitude, both in the way she advocates for what we could term "psychological realism" in the novel and for the way that she believes writers can achieve it. Thus, in this chapter, I will explore the methods by

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[409] Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*, 215.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid., 214.

which Rowling complicates familiar and simplistic story patterns in her novels and moves beyond previous fictions for children with her narrative. I will also demonstrate the manner by which Woolf's notions of "how to create characters that are real" and what she regards as constituting a "real" character can be extended to the way in which contemporary children's writers approach characterization.

The "Real" Problem of Children's Fantasy Literature OR The Problem of Fantastic Realism

I think it is perhaps first important to address the issue of the *possibility* of a realistic fantasy novel, or the fantastic realistic novel, before we discuss the methods of characterization employed by Rowling and her contemporaries. As I explained in Chapter Five, there is the assumption that in order for novels to be realistic, they must abandon the marvelous all together—or vice versa, as critics like Pennington and Byatt have asserted. I have argued that the fantasy in these texts, though it is both complex and observable, it is also an *ordinary* matter. In other words, it is accepted and integrated into the rationality and materiality of the fictional world. The "magic" or "fantasy" in the story is normative or becomes normative in the course of the novel or series. This ordinariness is an anathema to critics like Pennington and Byatt because they argue that the magic within the text should remain otherworldly and estranged from normalcy in order for the novel to be a successful fantasy. But, as I argued in Chapter Five that this ordinariness does not make Rowling's or Pullman's or Valente's Secondary Worlds any less magical, I argue now that if we accept that the magic exists, neither does this make these novels any less psychologically or rationally realistic. In the text, there is no clear opposition between fantasy and reality: reality *is* magical, magic *is* real. This coherence between literary realism and literary

fantasy is thus transferable to characters in the fictional world: Harry Potter *is* a wizard,

Iorek Byrnison *is* a talking polar bear, Gregor Mendel *is* a bug. If we return to Woolf's

essay, she declares:

> But now I must recall what Mr. Arnold Bennett says. He says that
> it is only if the characters are real that the novel has any chance of
> surviving. Otherwise, die it must. But, I ask myself, what is
> reality? And who are the judges of reality? A character may be real
> to Mr. Bennett and quite unreal to me. For instance, in this article
> he says that Dr. Watson in Sherlock Holmes is real to him: to me
> Dr. Watson is a sack stuffed with straw, a dummy, a figure of fun.
> And so it is with character after character—in book after book.
> There is nothing that people differ about more than the reality of
> characters, especially in contemporary books.[412]

Woolf asks in this passage what constitutes a "real" character in literature? And who

decides what is real and what is unreal? Why cannot we depart from the conventions of

characterization and abandon the mimetic constraints of what an arbitrary judge considers to

be realism? A character, Woolf tells us, does not have to translate directly into a flesh-and-

bone equivalent to be "real" to the reader. [413] This point is, I believe, related to children's

literature today.[414] In an interview with Achuka Children's Books, Philip Pullman clarifies

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[412] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 10.

[413] After all, not even in the most realistic novels can we perfectly translate the character on the page
into reality. For example, we know Elizabeth Bennett has "fine eyes" and gets tanned in summer
weather, but it is not necessary for us to know the number of freckles that dot her nose or whether
her finger nails are oval in shape for Elizabeth to be believable to the reader. Jane Austen leaves
much of the portraiture to us, and yet, because of the way Elizabeth is introduced and the way her
character is described throughout the novel that we can see her and, through her eyes, her world
clearly.

[414] While so many critics polarize the distinction between realism and fantasy in children's literature,
resenting this new way of integrating the two traditions because of the blatant disregard for genre or
because they believe a Secondary World not grounded in reality is more (to use Byatt's term)
numinous, they perhaps forget about the other types of fictions like the Greek epic tradition, or

the relationship between realism and fantasy in his novels, having come under recent attack

for his ironic statement that his books were not fantasy: "Is it true he claims his books aren't

fantasy? And where does he get off being so stupid?" Do you have an answer to that?[415]

Pullman's responded to these questions in this way:

> I have said that *His Dark Materials* is not fantasy but stark realism,
> and my reason for this is to emphasise what I think is an important
> aspect of the story, namely the fact that it is realistic, in
> psychological terms. I deal with matters that might normally be
> encountered in works of realism, such as adolescence, sexuality,
> and so on; and they are the main subject matter of the story — the
> fantasy (which, of course, is there: no-one but a fool would think I
> meant there is no fantasy in the books at all) is there to support and
> embody them, not for its own sake.[416]

In this interview, Pullman argues that novels do not necessarily have to follow all of the

conventions of "realistic fiction" in order to give us a real story, real characters, and real

themes. In fact, Pullman considers his own works to be closer to realism than they are to

fantasy, despite their magical framework. He continues:

> Daemons, for example, might otherwise be only a meaningless
> decoration, adding nothing to the story: but I use them to embody
> and picture some truths about human personality which I couldn't
> picture so easily without them. I'm trying to write a book about
> what it means to be human, to grow up, to suffer and learn. My
> quarrel with much (not all) fantasy is it has this marvellous toolbox
> and does nothing with it except construct shoot-em-up games. Why
> shouldn't a work of fantasy be as truthful and profound about
> becoming an adult human being as the work of George Eliot or
> Jane Austen? Well, there are a few fantasies that are. One of them

medieval dream visions, or the Gothic tradition, or magical realism, where the coherence of reality
and fantasy is normative.

[415] Philip Pullman, Interview, Achuka Books, http://www.achuka.co.uk/archive/interviews/ppint.php.

[416] Ibid.

is PARADISE LOST. That's where I get off being so stupid, in the words of that irony-free reader.[417]

In this way, Pullman's argument accords with Woolf's: the convincing construction of character is crucial to the success of the novel, and what constitutes "reality" is not bound by the constraints of traditional mimetic realism. His creation of daemons, for example, is part of his effort to create a truthful representation of human nature. Thus, a work of this kind, of "realistic fantasy," can be just as profound as a purely realistic novel and its characters can be just as lifelike, just as convincing in their humanity. In his Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech that I described in Chapter Five, Pullman exhorts readers to demand novels that tell good stories rather than accept sophisticated novels whose plots are secondary to technique. In this way, he echoes Virginia Woolf's admonition to novel-readers to demand good characters:

> Your part is to insist that writers shall come down off their plinths and pedestals, and describe beautifully if possible, truthfully at any rate, our Mrs. Brown. You should insist that she is an old lady of unlimited capacity and infinite variety; capable of appearing in any place; wearing any dress; saying anything and doing heaven knows what. But the things she says and the things she does and her eyes and her nose and her speech and her silence have an overwhelming fascination, for she is, of course, the spirit we live by, life itself.[418]

What is most important, then, is the engaging quality of the narrative and the convincingness of the characters, not the genre to which they belong. Mrs. Brown, of "infinite variety" and "capable of appearing in any place" and "doing heaven knows what" can therefore be

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[417] Ibid.

[418] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 23-24.

Elizabeth Bennett from early nineteenth century England, or she can be Madame Bovary from mid-nineteenth century France, or Stephen Daedalus from twentieth century Ireland. But, by the same method, she can also be Harry Potter from Little Whinging in Surrey, or Lyra Belacqua from Oxford, or September from Omaha. That, as James has told us, is the beauty of the novel: its variations are endless and it is capable of doing everything. Therefore, I argue that this new impulse in children's literature is actually helping the novelistic genre as a whole to retrieve its position as a site of possibility and innovation.

First Impressions or On Being a Good Hostess

Having settled the issue of the possibility of a realistic fantasy/fantastic realism novel, we can now progress to how contemporary children's fictions are able to convey the believability of their characters to the reader. To return to Virginia Woolf in 1923, she remarks that writers from the previous generation failed to achieve verisimilitude in their works because of the manner by which they dealt with their characters throughout the entirety of their novels. She also notes, however, that their failure was almost a foregone conclusion because of the way that they introduced their fictional personages to their readers. For Woolf, the problem lay in the writers' roundabout methods of trying to capture the essence of the character by describing that fictional person's surroundings, his/her occupation, his/her political affiliation, his/her daily routine—in short, everything but the person's identity or selfhood, or, in Woolf's words, everything but the nature of the fictional person's humanity. Woolf continues her essay by explaining why this indirect method came to be the norm, while lamenting the fact that the language of modern writers does not have the strength, freedom, or richness it once had in previous generations when, she tells her

readers, there wasn't this concern for "artful manners of speech" or for sophisticated codes

of conversion in which a character is understood by the writer's detailing of things wholly

unconnected to the fictional person's selfhood. Exasperated by these disingenuous

representations, in her essay Woolf urges writers to return to a method of characterization

that will make the character more accessible or recognizable to the reader. She writes:

> A convention in writing is not much different from a convention in
> manners. Both in life and in literature it is necessary to have some
> means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown
> guest on the one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the
> other. The hostess bethinks her of the weather, for generations of
> hostesses have established the fact that this is a subject of universal
> interest in which we all believe. She begins by saying we are
> having a wretched May, and, having thus got into touch with her
> unknown guest, proceeds to matters of greater interest. So it is in
> literature. The writer must get into touch with his reader by
> putting before him something which he recognizes, which
> therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to co-
> operate in the far more difficult business of intimacy.[419]

Woolf's entreaty for a connection to be established between writer and reader through a

moment of recognition is her solution to the writer's problem of creating a character and

conveying his/her selfhood to the reader. The idea that the writer is left to his own devices

when creating each character, without any common ground to aid him in convincing the

reader of the character's realness is, therefore, inaccurate. "A writer is never alone," Woolf

tells us, "There is always the public with him—if not on the same seat, at least in the

compartment next door."[420]

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[419] Ibid., 17.

[420] Ibid., 19.

This idea of progressing from convention to recognition to intimacy and finally to the "matters of greater of importance" described by Woolf is, I believe, the method by which contemporary children's writers create both believable characters and narratives with a serious purpose. As I have previously described, one of the dissatisfactions voiced by critics like A.S. Byatt and Harold Bloom about contemporary children's fictions that involve fantasy elements is that they are composed of what Byatt terms "derivative motifs." For example, for Byatt the reason that the *Harry Potter* books are so popular is not that Rowling's characterization of Harry is convincing on a literary level, but because her child's-eye view appeals on a psychoanalytic level to a child's psychology rather than to the sophisticated psychology of an adult. In Byatt's view, Harry is the familiar hero of a Freudian "family romance": a young child, dissatisfied with his ordinary home and his tyrannical relatives, invents a fairy tale in which he is secretly "of noble origin" or "marked out as a hero who is destined to save the world."[421] Byatt therefore mistakenly marks the Dursleys as Harry's "true enemy," because she assumes Rowling's child's-eye perspective coupled with this familiar beginning indicates that Rowling's story will follow the same trajectory that Freud observed in family romances. When Rowling's narrative diverges from what Byatt expects based on this template, she therefore claims that this indicates Rowling's failure as a writer.

Similarly, if we return to Harold Bloom's critique of Rowling, he also declares that she fails to write an innovative work of children's literature, citing her supposed dependence on the boarding school story. As Bloom so astutely points out, Rowling indeed begins her

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[421] A.S. Byatt, "Harry Potter and the Childish Adult," *The New York Times* (7 July 2003), http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/07/opinion/harry-potter-and-the-childish-adult.html.

series with what seems to be typical schoolboy narrative: a young orphaned boy is accepted

to a highly-selective British public school where he makes both friends and enemies, and

where he also becomes the beneficiary of the Headmaster's (Albus Dumbledore) guidance

and wisdom. Sport (Quidditch rather than rugby in Harry's case) figures largely in Harry's

early career at Hogwarts and the Quidditch pitch is where a young Harry finds he can best

distinguish himself. As in *Tom Brown's School Days*, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's

Stone* ends in the way most common to versions of this narrative: the protagonist (Harry)

foils his rival's (Draco Malfoy) plot to get him in trouble or expelled, is rewarded by the

beatific Headmaster (Dumbledore) for his goodness and merit, and his house (Gryffindor)

wins the day (in this case, the School Cup).

Characterization also seems dependent upon the roles prescribed by the school story,

and, in this way, Rowling's characters become immediately familiar to the reader: there is,

of course, the hero (Harry), the more experienced classmate/hero's best friend/accomplice

(Ron), the school nerd and tattletale (Hermione) who later becomes the third companion,[422]

the sensitive/frail/unpopular boy (Neville) to whom the hero behaves kindly, the bully

(Draco Malfoy), the classic stern-but-fair spinster schoolmistress (Minerva McGonagall),

the hateful and unjust teacher (Severus Snape), and the benevolent and brilliant Headmaster

(Dumbledore). Though some of the characters differ slightly in their roles (the introduction

of a female companion to complete the triumvirate, for example, is Rowling's innovation[423])

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[422] Karen Manners Smith tells us that adding a third companion is common practice in the school
story as it corresponds to the "rule of three" policy that historically operated in both boys' and girls'
boarding schools. For girls, it was primarily instituted for safety purposes, but for boys, the rule was
instituted partly for safety and partly to discourage homosexual experimentation. (Smith, 74)

[423] Previously, because school stories were also segregated by gender, the "rule of three" meant three
boys or three girls.

for the most part, Rowling follows the conventions of the school story by employing these familiar archetypes to form the basis for her characters.

Given the characterization and narrative trajectory of the first novel, it seems at this point in the series that Bloom is correct that Rowling seems indebted first and foremost to the boarding school story—that is, until the narrative becomes complicated by the events that occur between Harry and Professor Quirrell. Bloom sees the added magical components to *Harry Potter* as merely a stylistic choice—*Tom Brown* is "re-seen in the magic mirror of Tolkien"—and, moreover, he views it as a failed stylistic choice. However, other critics (such as, for instance, LeGuin and Pennington) have the opposite perspective: rather than perceiving *Harry Potter* as predominantly structured as a school story with added fantastical elements, they see *Harry Potter* as first and foremost a heroic fantasy novel with added realistic components, or, in other words, as *The Lord of the Rings* re-seen in the decidedly ordinary mirror of Thomas Hughes. In this light, the characters take on different though perhaps even more archetypal identities. For example, instead of being perceived as another Dr. Thomas Arnold, Professor Dumbledore becomes a powerfully magical yet grandfatherly figure whose character and behavior are reminiscent of many mentor figures in literature, such as the Professor in the *Narnia* books and Gandalf the Grey in *The Lord of the Rings*. It also appears that, because his situation is familiar, Harry's identity will follow the same trajectory as the heroes of previous children's fictions.

But what I would like to demonstrate in the following pages is that, while I agree that Rowling may have begun her series with a familiar character and story, her divergence from the conventional family romance or heroic fantasy was a conscious effort to destabilize the reader's expectations about the selfhood of her characters. By examining the progression of

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the *Harry Potter* novels in this chapter, I would like to demonstrate that even the most

individualized contemporary texts for children sometimes employ formulaic patterns with

archetypal bases, but their purpose in presenting these archetypes and familiar story patterns

is to first establish intimacy between reader and character and then to undermine the reader's

assumptions about the character's identity and his or her role in the narrative. In this way,

Rowling and her contemporaries challenge the preconceived notions about their texts and

push the limits of children's literature.

Heroes with a Thousand Faces

> *THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK*
> *LORD APPROACHES….BORN TO THOSE WHO HAVE THRICE*
> *DEFIED HIM, BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES… AND*
> *THE DARK LORD WILL MARK HIM AS HIS EQUAL, BUT HE*
> *WILL HAVE POWER THE DARK LORD KNOWS NOT… AND*
> *EITHER MUST DIE AT THE HAND OF THE OTHER FOR*
> *NEITHER CAN LIVE WHILE THE OTHER SURVIVES…. THE*
> *ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD*
> *WILL BE BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES…."* [424]

When Sybill Trelawney, Professor of Divination at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft

and Wizardry, unwittingly makes a prophesy to Headmaster Albus Dumbledore about a

certain child born at the end of July, 1980, her words secure a relationship between the

infant wizard Harry Potter and the long line of heroes that have come before him in Western

literature and culture. In the seven books that comprise his epic quest to defeat Lord

Voldemort, Harry encounters not only fabulous monsters and magical objects, but he must

also make complicated choices, endure betrayals and temptations, witness the torture and

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[424] Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, 741.

destruction of his friends and family, and even face his own death.   Myth, morality, politics, and fantasy are seamlessly and irrevocably bound together in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, its protagonist benefitting from a rich tradition of heroic action that dates back to Classical Antiquity, but which finds its mission and purpose in the 21st century.   Similarly, in *His Dark Materials*, Philip Pullman creates a multifarious universe where Eden and Oxford collide, religion and science intersect, witchcraft and politics intermingle, and where a delicate balance has been terribly upset. Pullman's heroine, Lyra Belacqua Silvertongue, like Harry, is the heir, or, perhaps more accurate, the reincarnation of heroines before her: "destined to bring about the end of destiny" at the price of a great betrayal, Lyra is prophesied by the witches to be the new Eve, a fate which makes her the enemy of the Church but also the savior of all possible worlds. In Catherynne Valente's *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*, yet another child is whisked off to a Secondary World where she, like Persephone before her, inadvertently abandons her mother when she eats the forbidden fruit of the otherworld. In Fairyland, every creature and adventure—from the wyverary A-through-L, to the soap Gollum, to the Worsted Wood, to the severing of September's shadow, to the paper lantern who sacrifices her light for September—recalls an earlier story, giving us what Neil Gaiman has called "a delicate balancing between modernism and the Victorian fairy tale."[425] In this way, contemporary writers for children have created characters that demonstrate the complexity and richness of a genre steeped in literary tradition; to read the novels of Rowling, as well as other contemporary children's writers like Pullman, Valente, Snicket, and Gaiman, is to engage in

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[425] Neil Gaiman, Review of *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairland in A Ship of Her Own Making*, Jacket Cover.

a dialogue with the past, bringing us face to face with the creative record of our culture. The protagonists we encounter, though unique and original in their identities, missions, and principles, are nevertheless cut from a very old and familiar cloth. It is thus in this way that contemporary writers for children capitalize on our familiarity with earlier parts of our culture and thereby establish a connection with their readers.

For example, when the seventeen-year-old Harry walks into the Forbidden Forest holding a stone with a peculiar magical property that allows him to speak to the dead and is himself murdered by Lord Voldemort, only to be resurrected after a foray into the afterlife, we, Harry's readers and witnesses to his drama, think to ourselves: we know this story, we know this boy, and we understand why he returns to conquer his enemy. We recognize the allusions to *The Odyssey* and its male protagonist's heroic journey to the world of the dead; or perhaps we see Harry as a Christ figure, venturing into the Garden of Gesthmene, knowing that it will lead him to Golgotha; or perhaps we think of Gilgamesh, undertaking a perilous journey to learn the secret of immortal life; we might even imagine Peter Pan, stealing himself on a lonely rock, assuring us that death "will be an awfully great adventure." It is especially the way contemporary writers like Rowling employ the child-hero protagonist as a cultural touchstone that permits an almost immediate intimacy between writer and reader. After all, much like the adult hero, the child-hero as a theme in Western literature has had a very long life indeed. Centuries before Harry disarmed his mortal enemy in the Great Hall of Hogwarts or Lyra Belacqua deceived the false king of the bears, and even long before Alice stood trial against a mad queen and Peter faced death at the hands (or hook) of a pirate, the idea that the most vulnerable member of our species could

conquer the agents of evil not only existed in Western culture and literature, but was one of the most influential concepts of heroism to be had.

What is more, the idea of the child functioning as a savior to the world existed long before narratives about child protagonists were written specifically for children. Instead, the child hero was first introduced as a central character and spokesperson in types of literature that could now be considered crossover narratives: mythology, religious texts, legends, and fairy tales. Contemporary children's fantasy fiction enlists these types of narratives, which are foundational to Western culture, in the telling of their own stories, refamiliarizing their readers with crucial characters from the literary past that also simultaneously help to inform the reading of the contemporary text. Therefore, by repurposing these multifarious past fictions in which the lines were blurred between the real and the marvelous, they create a literary situation in which the reader's imagination is stimulated by the expectation of a recognizable narrative and is thus willing to co-operate with the writer's operative mode, which is, in the case of these texts, fantastic realism.

"Making Over" the First Crossover Narratives

Before examining one such work of fantastic realism in which the heroic protagonist recalls past literary heroes, we might ask why these types of narratives (mythologies, religious texts, legends, and fairy tales) in particular have become so prevalent in contemporary children's fantasy literature. The first explanation for the repeated intertextual references to these texts deals with the question of genre. Mythology, religious texts, legends, and fairy tales are, like fantasy literature, narratives that are located somewhere between realism and the marvelous; they are not contingent on the plausibility of

their stories or the physical possibility of the events that they recount. However, despite their closeness to fantasy literature, these types of narrative have not been excluded from academic inquiry in the same way that children's literature or even adult fantasy literature have been excluded because these types of narratives were not addressed to an "unsophisticated" audience, but instead to a common audience that included adults and children, regardless of their intellectual capacity. Mythology, for example, has always been a pervasive and essential component of Western culture's collective imagination. As Alan Dundes has explained, myths are sacred texts that were used to explain how the world and humankind assumed their present form and were crucial to the establishment of customs, initiations, and taboos within a culture.[426] Mircea Eliade also argued that one of the foremost functions of myth is to establish models for behavior, which can be seen in mythological archetypes such as the cautionary tale.[427] In both ways, mythology has been essential to the development of Western culture. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, for centuries the study of mythology was considered an integral part of an elite classical education, and the texts of Homer, Hesiod, and other Greek and Roman poets were not only employed to teach students Greek and Latin, but also meticulously studied in an attempt to illuminate the religious, social, and political institutions of Ancient Greece, which, again became foundational elements of Western culture. As even the word 'classical' is derived from the Latin *classicus*, meaning "belonging to the highest class of

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[426] Alan Dundes, *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[427] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1957).

citizens," [428] the study of classical mythology was secure as a crucial part of the education of

the elite from Ancient Greece and Rome to the Middle Ages and through to the twentieth

century.[429] The stories from mythology also infamously inspired countless other great

works of Western literature for adults, from the Renaissance poets and playwrights like

Spenser and Shakespeare to the Romantic writers like Keats, Shelley, and Byron to the

Modernists like Yeats, Rilke, and Joyce. Thus, by alluding to and refashioning the stories

from mythology in their novels, Rowling and Pullman associate their works of children's

literature with works of adult literature that were similarly inspired.

In the same way, the religious stories that Rowling and many of her contemporaries

employ have also inspired numerous other works of "serious" literature and, like mythology,

are considered to be of central importance to the understanding of the evolution of Anglo-

European culture and its belief systems. The Bible is, of course, the most notable example

in the West as the canonical texts that comprise it have been considered sacred in Judaism as

well as in Christianity from the at least the 2nd century BCE. The Bible has also arguably

had more influence on Western history and literature than any other work, itself being the

first mass printed book in Europe. From the hagiographies of the saints written in the

Middle Ages, to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to Dante Aligheri's *The Divine Comedy*, to

William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, to John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* and

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[428] OED, "Classical," http://www.oed.com

[429] The Classical Education movement advocates a form of education that used to focus solely on the trivium and quadrivium, but has since expanded to include the study of literature, poetry, drama, philosophy, history, art, and languages. In the 1930s, Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins altered the curriculum of a classical education to include what they determined were the 'Great Books' of Western civilization.

Nikos Kazantzakis's *Last Temptation*, the Bible and the other religious texts of Judaism and

Christianity have inspired some of the most notable literary minds in Western history.

Even legends and fairy tales, the most criticized of the these so-called crossover

genres, have recovered their place in the literary canon, thanks to distinguished scholars like

Maria Tatar and Jack Zipes who, in the past thirty years, have shown that fairy tales are not

of marginal cultural importance and should not be dismissed as unworthy of critical

attention. As Marina Warner tells us in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and*

Their Tellers, previously, like children's literature, fairy tales were rhetorically deployed

from high culture:

> On a par with trifles, 'mere old wives' tales' carry connotations of
> error, of false counsel, ignorance, prejudice and fallacious
> nostrums—against heartbreak as well as headache; similarly 'fairy
> tale,' as a derogatory term, implies fantasy, escapism, invention,
> the unreliable consolations of romance.[430]

Like children's literature, the stories of the folk were trivialized and critics determined that

they were not part of the 'serious' canon of literature. However, as Maria Tatar writes,

"trivializing fairy tales leads to the mistaken conclusion that we should suspend our critical

faculties while reading these "harmless" narratives."[431] Yet, she argues, "the staying power

of these stories, their widespread and enduring popularity, suggests that they must be

addressing issues that have a significant social function—whether critical, conservative,

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[430] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994), 19.

[431] Maria Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), xi.

compensatory, or therapeutic."[432] Thus fairy tales are crucial to the study of a culture in that

they evoke a collective past experience and because they are also revelatory of a culture's

fundamental concerns. In addition, as Jack Zipes argues, it is a mistake to try to segregate

fairy tales for children from literature for adults:

> "…the fairy tale for children cannot be separated from the fairy
> tale for adults. The genre originated within an oral storytelling
> tradition and was created and cultivated by adults, and as the fairy
> tale became an acceptable literary genre first among adults, it was
> then disseminated in print in the eighteenth century to children.
> Almost all critics who have studied the emergence of the literary
> fairy tale in Europe agree that educated writers purposely
> appropriated the oral folktale and converted it into a type of
> literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that
> children and adults would become civilized according to the social
> code of that time.[433]

Thus, because fairy tales are so ingrained in our cultural consciousness, all literature,

whether it is for children or adults, finds that it is often informed by these stories.

Consequently, it follows that J. K. Rowling and Philip Pullman are mobilizing fairy tales in

order to bring children's literature and adult literature closer together.

    The second reason for the use of these crossover fictions is perhaps because, in order

to create children's literature that is able to earn legitimacy as a category, these writers

needed to find their inspirations in texts that pre-date the theories of Locke, Rousseau, and

the Romantics, theories which succeeded in separating the child from the adult in Western

thought and practice. As we have seen, John Locke's theory of education instigated a

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[432] Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales*, xi.

[433] Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The classical genre for children and the process of civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.

profound change in what would be considered appropriate (i.e. edifying) literature for children and thus set in motion the separation between the child's consciousness and that of the adult. In addition, Rousseau's insistence that children were fundamentally different from adults as well as his assertive belief in children's innate human goodness also transformed ideas about childhood and, consequently, how children should be cared for and addressed. The Romantics, following Rousseau's lead, further increased the separation of the worlds of adults and children, contrasting the pure innocence of the child with the experience of the adult. Childhood became sacrosanct and there arose a desire to protect the child from adult knowledge and responsibilities, those "painful complexities of modern life." In addition, by drawing greater attention to the child's vulnerability in contrast to the adult's agency, the Romantics would set the tone for the notions about childhood for the rest of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in both literature and society. However, as I have previously noted, up until the latter part of the 18th century literature for adults and literature for children were often comprised of the same stories. Therefore, by returning to these genres that have always been crossover texts, Rowling and her contemporaries intimate that their works are equally appropriate for an audience of adults as for an audience of children. Mythology, religious texts, legends, and fairy tales are alike in that they have undergone a change in their intended audience through time, migrating from the sphere of the adult to the sphere of the child and moving back again to swing like a pendulum between the two.

Therefore, by engaging these multifarious past fictions in which the lines were blurred between the real and the marvelous, contemporary writers for children create a literary situation in which the reader's imagination is stimulated by the expectation of a

recognizable narrative and is thus willing to co-operate with the writer's fantastic realism. But by mobilizing fairy tales, myths, legends, and religious texts in the establishment of their protagonists' selfhoods, contemporary writers for children also create a literary situation in which they can play with preconceived notions about their characters' identities and roles in the narrative. Employing Rowling's *Harry Potter* epic as my example, I would now like to give you a more specific demonstration of the way that contemporary works of literature for children present the reader with recognizable archetypes and familiar heroic fantasy story patterns in order to move their readers' relationship with the characters from recognition to intimacy—and then, ultimately, to move beyond all prescribed ideas about character and narrative.

Harry Potter and the Herculean Heritage

By identifying her protagonist as an infant survivor of a deadly power, Rowling allies Harry with perhaps the first and most famous hero in Western culture: Hercules. After all, as it has so often happened since, what could be argued as the first story of childhood heroism in Western literature also began with this boy who lived. The similarity of Rowling's *Harry Potter* epic[434] to the myth of Hercules, I believe, is deliberate; it is entirely plausible that Rowling, a classics major and avid reader of mythology, chose to allude to this particular mythological story both because of its connection to heroism and its connection to childhood. The myth of Hercules—or, by his first name, the Greek Heracles—told and retold throughout Classical Antiquity by poets and playwrights such as

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[434] "Epic" is Rowling's term, or at least it is the term employed by her publishers as it appears on the dust jacket of the final installment.

Herodotus, Homer, Hesiod, Plautus, Ovid, and Pindar, has become synonymous with heroism, its countless variations pervading Western literature and culture even through to the present day[435]. But in addition to providing an example of a mythical protagonist who has remained prominent in our collective cultural memory, the Hercules myth is also an appropriate inspiration for *Harry Potter* because, in several episodes described by classic writers, Hercules, like Harry, performs heroic acts as a child. Additionally and interestingly, Hercules, as the son of Zeus, is also often referred to as "Child of Zeus" along with, or even in place of, his given name, as if his identity was forever and irrevocably linked with this youthful status, just as Harry will always be "The Boy Who Lived."[436]

Perhaps most importantly, the stories involving the Hercules myth also have the quality of a typical narrative for children in that Hercules is constantly being educated, progressing from one task to the next in his ultimate quest to achieve the full status of a god. In his influential book, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*, Seth Lerer notes Hercules's continued connection with children's literature. He tells us that in a papyrus text of the labors of Hercules from the third century AD, a dialogue between the hero Hercules and a country bumpkin (*deinos agroikos*) is recorded: "'Speak, child of Olympian Zeus, tell me what was your first labor' I said."[…].[437] Here, though Hercules has already completed heroic tasks and stands before the *deinos agroikos* a fully

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[435] Such widespread circulation of the myth of Hercules extends from Ancient Greece to Disney.

[436] Interestingly, after his mortal death, though Hercules achieves the status of an immortal and is no longer considered as just a child of Zeus, he marries Hebe, the goddess of eternal youth, still tethering the hero to the idea of childhood.

[437] Oxyrhynchus papyrus 22.2332, 3rd c. AD. Reproduced in Seth Lerer's *Children's Literature* (22) from Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

grown (if young) adult male, he is addressed not as a man, but as a child of a god. Lerer writes, "Hercules appears here not generally as hero or as man but specifically as *pai Zenos Olympiou*, child of Olympian Zeus. His paternity, his status as a son, is paramount."[438] Hercules's status as child rather than a man continues when, in other recordings of his story, he is addressed by the gods and goddesses who reside on Mount Olympus; regardless of his age, he is considered to be a child of their kind. His accomplishments, no matter how great they might be for a half-mortal man, are still viewed by the immortals as a sort of practical exam in his development from being the child of a god to becoming a god himself. Seth Lerer writes, "The labors of Hercules had long been seen as something of an allegory of the education or development of the young."[439]

Therefore, though Harold Bloom has noted that the Harry Potter books recall boarding school narratives like *Tom Brown's School Days* and fantasy literature like *The Lord of the Rings*, by placing the Harry Potter novels alongside the Hercules myth we see that Rowling's narrative actually has other roots—and that these roots are deeper than Bloom assumes. In this way, Rowling begins to undermine the reader's preconceived notions about her character's identity as merely another Tom Brown with added magic. Instead, with Harry's resemblance to Hercules (in addition to previously mentioned figures like Christ, Peter Pan, Gilgamesh, King Arthur, etc.) Rowling intimates that Harry's identity reflects multiple literary traditions that have influenced Western culture and, in this way, his character is easily recognizable to the reader as part of a more diverse literary lineage. By establishing more than one connection to past literary heroes, we see that Rowling adopts

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[438] Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 22.

[439] Ibid., 21.

Virginia Woolf's method of creating moments of recognition between reader and character by finding common ground between the character with whom the reader is culturally familiar and the new character being introduced in the contemporary narrative.

For example, Rowling solidifies the relationship between ancient hero Hercules and contemporary hero Harry through her protagonist's origin story. Like Hercules, Harry's birth and heroism is foretold in prophesy, but most importantly, for both heroes, their fame begins in infancy with a story that will define the rest of their lives. The most significant heroic act involving Hercules's childhood revolves around an act he performed as a newborn. In Pindar's *Nemean Odes*, the prophet Tiresias, foretelling the part the hero will play in the battle of the gods against the Giants, tells the story of the infant Hercules, newborn son of Zeus and Alcmena. Shortly after his birth, says Tiresias, Hercules was "wrapped in yellow swaddling bands" and lain in his crib by his adoring mother, only to be attacked by serpents sent by the jealous and murderous goddess, Hera.[440] Hera, who was furious to find out that Hercules was the illegitimate child of her husband, was determined to destroy her stepson. Hercules, however, showing early signs of his superhuman strength, strangled the two snakes in his hands before they could bite him. In failing to kill him as an infant, Hera's fury increased and she pursued him venomously throughout the rest of his life. Indeed, the child Hercules both benefitted and suffered from his status as Zeus's son. His extraordinary strength and heroism won him the respect and favor of both gods and mortals, but his step-mother made the half-mortal's entire life a misery, tormenting him from youth through adulthood with impossible tasks, madness, and monsters until his ultimate death and "re-birth" as a god.

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[440] Pindar, Nemean Odes, 1.33-72 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

The hero Harry Potter, like his predecessor Hercules, also began his life already under threat of extinction and encountered murderous jealousy as an infant. In Chapter One of *Philosopher's Stone*, though at first unaware of the particulars involving the deaths of Lily and James Potter and Harry's survival, the reader becomes attuned to Harry's heroism by the conversation between Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall in which they reveal that never before had anyone survived the Avada Kedavra curse. Harry's defensive strength is, at first, inexplicable:

> 'It's – it's *true*?' faltered Professor McGonagall. 'After all he's done … all the people he's killed … he couldn't kill a little boy? It's just astounding … of all the things to stop him … but how in the name of heaven did Harry survive?'[441]

But despite—or rather perhaps because of—the mystery that surrounds Harry's survival, this episode follows Harry for the rest of his life and defines him in the eyes of the wizarding world as "The Boy Who Lived." Through Prof. McGonagall's observations of the Dursleys, haters of all things magical, Rowling also intimates that, as Hera would never accept Hercules as her stepson, Harry's adopted family will also never accept him as part of their family. But, to return to A.S. Byatt, we find that if we place Harry's story alongside the Hercules myth, she is incorrect that the Dursleys are Harry's true enemy. They are adversaries, certainly, but they are not enemies. Unlike Hercules's relationship with Hera, Harry's relationship with his mother's family changes over the course of the novels, especially in the last three installments: Harry and his aunt and uncle develop something of a grudging truce, and Dudley, who was once Harry's childhood nemesis, demonstrates his

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[441] Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 15.

respect, gratitude, and concern for Harry by the end of the series. In this way, it becomes obvious that Harry's real enemy is not his "adopted family" and that viewing Harry Potter from this perspective, with its prescribed roles and narrative trajectory, does not make sense. Instead, by *Goblet of Fire*, Rowling makes it clear that we've moved beyond the family romance and into something else: heroic fantasy. Therefore, Harry's true enemy is Voldemort, the supernatural villain who tried to kill him in his infancy and will not rest until he is destroyed, as the goddess Hera is the true enemy of Hercules and the ultimate cause of his suffering.[442]

Throughout the rest of the series, as we learn more about his first act of heroism and his lineage, Rowling continues to tie Harry's narrative to the heroic fantasy genre through its resemblance to the Hercules myth and the theme of prophetic destiny. In the third and fifth installments, the reader learns that due to the prophecy conveyed by Professor Trelawney to Dumbledore (which was overheard by then-Death Eater Severus Snape and in turn conveyed to his master), Lord Voldemort learned about the birth of the wizard who could be his downfall. Voldemort, like Hera, was enraged and, using a spy (Peter Pettigrew, also known as Wormtail) to discover the Potter's home in Godric's Hollow, arrived there determined to kill Harry. The connections to Hercules increase as we learn more about the circumstances involving Lily's and James's deaths and Harry's survival: After murdering James Potter, Voldemort pursued Lily, who had tried to barricade herself and her son in Harry's room. Lily (here mirroring the actions of Alcmena) placed her son in his crib and, when Voldemort entered the room, she tried to shield Harry with her own body and beseeched Voldemort to

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[442] Later, we will witness the way she complicates the identity of Harry's enemy still further when the novels successfully establish intimacy between reader and character and then move beyond this to more serious matters.

spare Harry. However, when Lily refused to stand aside,[443] Voldemort murdered Lily and then cursed Harry with the deadly *Avada Kedavra*, one of the three Unforgivable Curses in the wizarding world, which causes instant death. Instead of killing the child, the curse rebounded, severing the two remaining parts of Voldemort's soul, one part attaching itself to the only living thing left in the room: the infant Harry Potter. In this way, Voldemort fulfilled the part of the prophecy that was yet unknown to him: that he himself would mark his adversary as his equal through a transference of power. As a consequence of this unintentional transference, Harry unwittingly adopted another lineage, that of Salazar Slytherin, one of the four co-founders of Hogwarts and whose symbol is, of course, a snake. Harry also became a Parselmouth (one with the ability to speak with snakes) as a by-product of the fragment of Lord Voldemort's soul that resided within him.

Thus, Harry's existence as a hero begins with a double heritage, marking him as The Chosen One both by prophecy and by the free will of his enemy's choice[444]. As scholar Mary Pharr tells us, since the heroes of Ancient Greece, heritage has usually been an essential component of the hero's identity:

> Oftentimes, for a hero, that beginning lies within one's heritage.
> Heroes may seem to come from nowhere, but they are seldom just
> the luck of the draw; they are more traditionally the deus ex
> machina of the universe, the intervention of the past into the
> present in order to preserve the future. Biologically, genetically,

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[443] Initially, Voldemort did not enter the room with the intention of killing Lily because he was asked by the spy, Severus Snape, to spare her. Snape's love for Lily will play a key part in the later novels and contribute to Voldemort's final undoing.

[444] As we will discuss later, it was possible for Harry to have not been the boy Sybil Trelawney referenced in the prophesy because there were two boys born at the end of July: Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom. However, because Voldemort chose Harry as the most likely of the two boys to be his enemy, he unwittingly marked Harry as his equal by cursing him, thus making Harry the Chosen One through choice as well as through prophetic foresight.

> an embryonic hero is likely to come from appropriately strong
> roots, good DNA; mythologically, he is the scion of earlier heroes
> whose qualities are enhanced by a new environment's fresh rigors
> and opportunities.[445]

For Hercules, his genetic roots prove to be the strongest possible as he is descended from Zeus, the most powerful and ruler of all the gods and goddesses. Additionally, Hercules has a double heritage as he is also raised as the son of another powerful man, Amphitryon, the King of Thebes. In this way, Hercules's genetic code already predisposes him to greatness in a twofold manner. Similarly, Harry's genetic heritage, which precedes the heritage unintentionally bestowed upon him by Voldemort, also demonstrates to the reader that Harry is a hero not just by luck of the draw. His mother and his father are, from all accounts in the novels[446], a highly skilled witch and wizard, respectively, who as members of the original Order of the Phoenix had already begun the heroic fight to bring an end to Voldemort that Harry will continue in the seven installments of his narrative. What is more, as we learn in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, because the Potters are descendents of the third Peverell brother (from whom Harry's family inherits the invisibility cloak), Harry is not only again revealed to be distantly related to Voldemort (whose family inherited the Resurrection Stone from the second Peverell brother), but his relationship to Ignotus Peverell allies him with this earlier heroic wizard.[447]

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[445] Mary Pharr, "*In Medias Res*: Harry Potter as Hero-in-Progress," *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, ed. Lana A. Whited, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 54.

[446] Hagrid (Book 1), Professor Dumbledore (Book 1), Professor Horace Slughorn (Book 6), Sirius Black (Books 3, 4, 5), Remus Lupin (Books 3, 4, 5), Professor McGonagall (Book 3), as well as various other members of the wizarding world have mentioned the Potters skill and heroism.

[447] As the only brother who is able to successfully outwit Death in the "Tale of the Three Brothers," the third Peverell brother demonstrates that he is a hero not only by choosing the wisest gift and thus

Rowling thus ties Harry to Hercules in his origins and lineage, but we also find similarities between Harry and Hercules as well as other mythological heroes throughout all seven years of his magical education. Most notable in Hercules's heroic legacy are the twelve labors set for him by Eurystheus. Driven mad by Hera, Hercules slew his own six sons by Megara. When he finally recovered his sanity, he was deeply regretful and sought to atone for his actions. He traveled to Delphi and was told by the oracle there (Pythoness) to go and serve King Eurystheus and to perform whatever tasks the King set for him. In return, Hercules would be given immortality. Eurystheus originally ordered Hercules to perform ten labors, which Hercules successfully accomplished. Eurystheus, however, refused to recognize two of them: 1) the cleansing of the Augean stables, because Hercules intended to accept payment for the labor (though when Augeas refused to pay him, Hercules killed him) and also because Eurystheus claimed that Hercules did not do the work himself but merely rerouted the rivers Altheus and Paneus to manage the cleaning; 2) the slaying of the Lernaean Hydra because Hercules was helped by his nephew and charioteer, Iolaus. Consequently, Eurystheus set two more tasks for Hercules, bringing the number to twelve: fetching the Golden Apples of Hesperides and capturing Cerberus, the three-headed hellhound guardian of the Underworld. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Harry, Ron, and Hermione must complete seven tasks in order to reach the Philosopher's Stone ahead of Lord Voldemort's henchman, Professor Quirrell—tasks that begin with lulling to sleep a three-headed dog (named Fluffy this time, not Cerberus) who guards the

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eluding Death, but by then welcoming Death at the end of his life without fear, but "as an old friend," and departing his life as Death's equal.

entrance to the bowels of the castle. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry must

perform seemingly impossible tasks in the Tri-Wizard Tournament, such as remaining

underwater for over an hour while he searches for and rescues that which the merpeople

took from him (Ron) as well as capturing the golden egg of a dragon, a feat reminiscent of

Hercules's capture of the golden hind and his quest for the golden fleece.[448] In *Deathly

Hallows*, during his quest to destroy the remaining five Horcruxes, Harry must also face a

hydra made out of fiend fyre (a magical and extremely dangerous type of fire that is created

by dark magic) and like Hercules, escapes only with the aid of his friends.

Perhaps the greatest similarity between Hercules and Harry is the analogous result of

their unique heroic educations. As Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon write, in

stories of the twelve labors Hercules changes "from a local hero into the benefactor of all

humankind."[449] During the twelve labors, Hercules acts heroically in service of a kingdom

and as atonement for his previous actions, rather than solely in promotion of himself. In this

way, he matures as a man as well as a hero before he finally achieves immortality.

Hercules's new status as a god is not earned until the moment of his death when, with a clap

of thunder, the long-suffering Hercules is brought up to Heaven. It is only then that his

issues with his stepmother, Hera, are resolved and she no longer sets tasks for him to

accomplish or obstacles for him to overcome. In her series, Rowling intimates throughout

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[448] Harry, like another mythological hero, Theseus, must also find his way through a deadly maze
and, like Oedipus, answer a question posed to him by a Sphinx. In addition, as it was for Hercules,
stealth is required for many of Harry's adventures and thus Harry uses his invisibility cloak to
perform various tasks such as smuggling an illegal dragon out of the castle grounds and trespassing
in out-of-bounds areas (such as Hogsmeade and the Forbidden Forest), reminiscent of Hercules's
labors of obtainment: the stealing of the golden apples, the obtainment of Hippolyta's girdle, etc.

[449] Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, Seventh Edition (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2003), 532.

the novels that Harry too must grow as a mortal man and become aware of his potential as a benefactor in order to achieve his destiny. As he proceeds from book to book, Harry, like Hercules, in confronted with obstacles and suffering, and learns that it is not enough to stop Voldemort only for his own protection, but rather that true heroism comes with selfless action.

Leaving the Hero Behind

By anchoring her protagonist's identity first to that of the British school boy and then to that of an ancient Greek hero and his heroic fantasy inheritors, Rowling succeeds in creating a character who is recognizable to the reader on many literary levels. Therefore, she not only legitimizes Harry as a member of this heroic tradition, but also, because of this familiarity, helps the reader be willing to collaborate with Rowling as she tells Harry's story. However, it is also thanks to Harry's familiarity that the reader anticipates a conventional character arc for Rowling's protagonist: at the series' end, in escaping the Dursleys and winning the admiration and respect of his professors and peers, it seems Harry has fulfilled his role as the hero of the British boarding school story; in defeating Lord Voldemort, it seems that Harry has fulfilled his heroic fantasy destiny. Because the earlier novels seem to follow familiar story patterns and because Rowling's characters seem to adhere to their prescribed roles, critics like Bloom, Byatt, and Pennington therefore assume that Rowling series is unexceptional and can never break free from the constraints of these earlier "genre" literatures. They claim that Rowling's connections to "lesser" fictions render her novels derivative and her characters hackneyed. Additionally, because the *Harry Potter* novels observe many of the formulas of these genre fictions and exhibit many of their motifs, they

assume that any point of discrepancy or, as Pennington puts it, "bending the rules," is an additional failure in a *she-can't-seem-to-get-anything-right* kind of way.

But I argue that Rowling diverts from or rejects expectations about story pattern and characterization that are based upon genre or readership in order to elevate her novels and, in turn, the children's literature category and to create a work of fiction that effaces these arbitrary boundaries. Though her narrative and characters perhaps at first seem solely dependent upon the school story, or heroic fantasy, or other previous children's fictions—and I believe Rowling intentionally leads us to believe in this dependence in order to demonstrate her alliance to the children's literature category—she moves beyond these influences by subverting the expectations to which they give rise. In other words, while she evokes heroic fantasy and the school story through familiar story patterns and characters in children's literature, Rowling ultimately undermines the conventional connections that exist between Harry's narrative and these previous fictions in order to show us that children's literature can be serious and complex in addition to telling us a story in which, to borrow Pullman's phrase, the events really matter.

For example, when we read the earlier *Harry Potter* novels (*Philosopher's Stone*, *Chamber of Secrets*, and *Prisoner of Azkaban*) our recognition of Harry as the protagonist of a school story or of a heroic fantasy naturally affects our readerly understanding of his character and our expectations for his development.[450] The *Bildungsroman*-esque style of these types of narratives is incredibly familiar as well as psychologically appealing to readers, as evidenced by Joseph Campbell's famous analysis of myth in *The Hero With a*

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[450] This is perhaps most clear if we examine the way Harry's destiny is prophesied and the way that prophesy is ultimately fulfilled.

Thousand Faces. In this work of comparative mythology, Campbell argues that

mythologies and other narratives about the hero that continue to exist in our cultural

memory share a fundamental structure. Though the idea that there is a standard hero's story

that is pervasive across *all* cultures is controversial to say the least, Campbell's exhaustive

analysis nevertheless demonstrates that the hero's journey and his rites of passage are

familiar to numerous and diverse cultures, and thus that this kind of developmental narrative

in which an ordinary or unlikely individual achieves a sense of identity and fulfills a greater

purpose is incredibly appealing to the human imagination. Because these growth narratives

have become so familiar, however, they run the risk of becoming codified to such an extent

that their stories and characters become banal and predictable.

Indeed, in other children's literature texts written during the twentieth century

adherence to the tradition of heroic fantasy or the school story can be seen as consolatory

escapism and the hero becomes cliché because the narrative trajectory and his reactions to it

are easily anticipated. In these texts, writers like Thomas Hughes, Frank Richards (alias

Charles Hamilton), J. R. R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis exploit the *bildungsroman* structure in

order to take what we could call "psychological shortcuts." For example, in *Tom Brown's

Schooldays*, when Tom gets into a fight in order to protect the frail and sensitive Arthur, the

reader is directed by the familiar trajectory of the text to understand that Tom has developed

into a moral young man though we have very little insight into his internal psychological

struggle. Or, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when Peter slays the White Witch's

wolf, Fenris (an event that I will further deconstruct in the following paragraph), his success

signals his growth as a warrior and indicates his future as a hero and leader of Narnia.

Shortcuts like these, though they succeed in quickly indicating a character's psychological

growth through symbolic events, rob the characters of their "realness" and believability as they simultaneously divest the narrative of its complexity and verisimilitude. If we compare Tom's or Peter's situation with that of, for instance, Konstantin Dmitrich Levin in *Anna Karenina*, the difference in their moral growth becomes clear. Though Levin discovers his faith and becomes (in Tolstoy's eyes) a model human being after a critical event occurs during which he fears for the life of his wife and son when a huge oak tree is felled by lightening, his conversion is not solely precipitated by this event but is rather the result of Levin's struggle for self-discovery which has occupied him for the novel's entirety. Thus, by focusing the attention on the symbolic event without an equal exploration of the character's moral or intellectual struggle, these twentieth century narratives for children neglect the necessary steps for the reader to become intimate with the character, an intimacy that Virginia Woolf reminds us is crucial to the novel's success. Consequently, because the identities of child characters were portrayed as more simplistic than characters in adult fiction, children's literature of the twentieth century grew further apart from adult literature.

Additionally, as I will now demonstrate, unlike in literature for adults in which the adult protagonist is usually permitted to be the hero of his or her own narrative, in many twentieth century fictions for children, though there is ostensibly a child protagonist, s/he is not the real hero or the only hero of the story. Instead, the child is often aided by an adult hero who is more knowledgeable, more brave, and more intelligent that the child hero will ever be or could ever hope to be. This adult hero is the person who ultimately ascends to a higher plane of knowledge and power that the child hero, though s/he may also develop, will never achieve.[451] Consequently, though the reader recognizes the child's heroism because it

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[451] An obvious example of this is Gandalf the Grey becoming Gandalf the White after he fights the Balrog in *The Lord of the Rings*. Though Frodo manages to destroy the Ring of Power, he does not

is coded in their narrative by certain symbolic events, the child's heroism usually remains inferior to the heroism of the adult.

For example, in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the first novel in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (1950-1956),[452] the narrative has, arguably, five protagonists: Aslan the Lion, who is the anthropomorphic representation of Christ, and the four Pevensie children (Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy).[453] Though the four children are central to the text in as much as they are a crucial part of the prophecy announcing Aslan's return, they are not the most important heroes of the story. The Pevensies remain inferior to Aslan, the allegorical representation of Christ, no matter how much time has passed or how many experiences they have, a fact that is recognized and accepted by all of the characters in the book, including the children themselves. While Aslan is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, always wise and selfless, the children are constantly being reminded of their faults and their lack of knowledge. Edmund in particular is the scapegoat of the story and his identity for most of the book—as a traitor to his siblings and to the true Narnians—is

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achieve the power or knowledge that Gandalf attains. Though he is respected as the most heroic hobbit, he is still referred to as a Halfling by the other races.

[452] *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was the first book to be published in the series, however, *The Magician's Nephew* (which is a reworking of the Adam and Eve story) precedes this book according to the fictional world's chronology.

[453] The four children, who have been relocated to a country house during the Second World War, find a wardrobe through which they enter a magical otherworld called Narnia. Narnia is both wondrous and dangerous as it is under the control of the White Witch, who rules Narnia through cruelty and corruption. The four children arrive and are told they are part of a prophecy that announces the return of Aslan, the true ruler of Narnia. Aslan is described as being both beautiful and terrible, and he councils the children and the "good" Narnians on how to fight the Witch. However, the night before battle, Aslan sacrifices himself to the White Witch, allowing her to kill him on a slab of stone, only to be resurrected the following morning. He, along with Susan and Lucy (who had witnessed his sacrifice and were the first to see him after his resurrection), enter the Witch's home and return the captives she had turn to stone to full life, leading them back to the other Narnians with whom they fight to finally vanquish the Witch and her army.

associated with that of Judas the Betrayer. Even though he eventually renounces the Witch,

Edmund's betrayal causes Aslan to forfeit his own life in order to recover him. When Aslan

brings Edmund back to the camp, even before the children are given a chance to speak,

Aslan says to them: "Here is your brother, and—there is no need to talk to him about what is

past."[454]   Here Lewis again reinforces the idea of Aslan as the superior hero, not only by

making Aslan's forgiveness immediate and selfless, but by implying that the children's

forgiveness will not come as easily or as sincerely as his own.

In addition, the three other children, despite their heroic actions against the White

Witch, are also consistently chided or taught lessons by Aslan, whose actions are unfailingly

infallible.   For instance, if we return to the moment where Peter saves Susan from the attack

of the White Witch's Wolf, we witness the way in which his heroic efforts are belittled

because of his neglect of his weapon:

> Peter, still out of breath, turned and saw Aslan close at hand.
> "You have forgotten to clean your sword," said Aslan.
> It was true. Peter blushed when he looked at the bright blade and saw it all smeared with the Wolf's hair and blood. He stooped down and wiped it quite clean on the grass, and then wiped it quite dry on his coat.
> "Hand it to me and kneel, Son of Adam," said Aslan. And when Peter had done so he struck him with the flat of the blade and said, "Rise up, Sir Peter Fenris-Bane. And, whatever happens, never forget to wipe your sword."[455]

In this way, Lewis demonstrates to us that despite Peter's heroism, he is only the squire to

Aslan's knight, the knight to Aslan's king. Why is wiping a blade so important in Narnia?

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[454] C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 136.

[455] Ibid., 129.

It remains unclear, but what is intimated is that it is a warrior's duty to take care of his equipment; something that Aslan—the superior warrior—knows instinctively, but which Peter—the novice hero—has yet to learn. Nevertheless, after this one event, it is understood that Peter has progressed along his heroic journey and will be a great warrior and leader, roles which, indeed, he assumes the very next day in the battle. And yet, even when Peter does learn how to wipe his sword and even when he does become a hero of Narnia, he is never a hero in his own right. Not only must his choices always coincide with Aslan's choices, but his actions are always prescribed by his role. It therefore comes as no surprise to the reader when Peter is called King Peter the Magnificent, though, given that we know very little about what makes him Magnificent perhaps it *should* come as a surprise after all.

At the end of the Narnia books, even though the three remaining Pevensie children have supposedly grown in their knowledge and faith, Aslan remains the ultimate and uncontested hero of the tale. In *The Last Battle*, when Narnia is in ruins despite the continued heroism of these former kings and queens who "stood firm at the darkest hour," Aslan makes it clear that he does not need their help.[456] He says, "But come, children. I have other work to do." By referring to them as children and using the singular "I" rather than "we," Aslan confirms his superiority in skill and in role; he is the ultimate defender of Narnia. From the first book to the last, the Pevensies' knowledge remains, to borrow a phrase from Rowling, "woefully incomplete." Even Narnia itself, the land of which they were once the rulers, is revealed to be out of the Pevensies' range of knowledge and influence. Kept in the dark until the very end, the Pevensies find out that not only is their former kingdom not the true Narnia, but that they are not even alive; they all, including their

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[456] C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 146.

parents, have been killed in a railway accident, a fact that Aslan relates to them as if it were a happy surprise: "The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."[457] Aslan is the only hero who has complete knowledge of the whole truth of the situation. The rest of the characters are viewed as incomplete, lacking in knowledge and experience. In this way, the child characters in this fantasy fiction remain firmly segregated from the adults, even when they become adults themselves. It can thus be argued that C. S. Lewis and other fantasy fiction writers for children since the end of the Golden Age have seemed content to allow the gap between children and adults, in both literature and reality, to widen. As Philip Pullman writes in an article for *The Guardian*:

> To solve a narrative problem by killing one of your characters is something many authors have done at one time or another. To slaughter the lot of them, and then claim they're better off, is not honest storytelling: it's propaganda in the service of a life-hating ideology. But that's par for the course. Death is better than life; boys are better than girls; light-coloured people are better than dark-coloured people; and so on. There is no shortage of such nauseating drivel in Narnia, if you can face it.[458]

This "nauseating drivel" and the like, which has dominated children's literature since the end of the Golden Age, was, indeed a kind of propaganda—by claiming that children were better off with this kind of simplistic, protective storytelling, authors of children's literature stunted the growth of their own genre.

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[457] Ibid., 183.

[458] Philip Pullman. (This article was originally found on The Guardian URL at http://reports.guardian.co.uk/articles/1998/10/1/p-24747.html. Unable to find it with the original address, this is a copy of the one taken off that URL in 1998.) © Copyright Guardian Media Group plc.1998

Pullman's vitriolic statement demonstrates his allegiance to a different kind of storytelling, one in which narrative problems are not solved by "slaughtering the lot" of child protagonists. Rather, in his narratives, child protagonists are given the opportunity to be just as knowledgeable as the adults and to choose their own destinies. Lyra and Will, like Lyra's parents Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter, choose their ultimate fates with full knowledge of the consequences. J. K. Rowling's novels explore the same possibilities for her protagonists, allowing them the choice to shoulder the burden of responsibility when their world is in peril. Both series emphasize that heroism comes with knowledge, experience, and a mature commitment to the mission despite all obstacles. Unlike Aslan, who constantly demonstrates to the Pevensies that he is the better, wiser, superior being, when Harry Potter chooses his own death and meets his mentor, Albus Dumbledore, in the afterlife, Dumbledore tells Harry:

> "Can you forgive me?" he said. "Can you forgive me for not trusting you? For not telling you? Harry, I only feared that you would fail as I had failed. I only dreaded that you would make my mistakes. I crave your pardon, Harry. I have known, for some time now, that you are the better man."[459]

Unlike Aslan who always seems to know what is coming, in this final dialogue with Harry Dumbledore admits that his mistakes have been grave and numerous, that his plans have been imperfect, and that they have even "backfired." Additionally, in this narrative, the adult hero Dumbledore admits his weaknesses and his own mistakes when trying to vanquish evil, and, furthermore, correctly claims that the younger protagonist, once his protégé, is the superior. Dumbledore refuses to condescend to Harry as a child, which is also why he

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[459] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 571.

addresses him as: "You wonderful boy, you brave, brave man."[460] Both descriptions are

accurate because to the aged Dumbledore, Harry Potter is both: an incredibly precocious

young person who has demonstrated through his heroism that he is also a responsible man.

Both he and Harry have a childlike quality to their identities, but both are also mature,

experienced, responsible, and, undeniably, heroic.

The Unexpected Champion

The literary convention of the time is so artificial—you have to talk about the weather and
nothing but the weather throughout the entire visit—that, naturally, the feeble are tempted to
outrage, and the strong are led to destroy the very foundations and rules of literary
society.[461]

The way in which *Harry Potter* most significantly differs from previous fictions for

children is that Rowling refuses to allow her narrative to take the psychological shortcuts

that render narratives predictable and characters cliché. Instead, while she is unapologetic

about her novels being a part of the children's literature category, she does not always

gratify the expectations that this category implies. Or rather, it is perhaps more accurate to

say that she both gratifies the expectations of the children's literature while simultaneously

undermining them by also allying her novels with the sophistication and complexity that has

hitherto been the sole province of adult fiction. As the Harry Potter novels progress,

Rowling's narrative strategy emerges: though she evokes the materials and methods of

previous fictions for children in her seven volume epic, she also complicates the expected

trajectories and character arcs, and in this way elevates her series above its assumed

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[460] Ibid., 566.

[461] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 21.

simplicity and challenges the notion that children's novels cannot be as sophisticated or as complex as novels for adults.

For example, in *Philosopher's Stone*, *Chamber of Secrets*, and *Prisoner of Azkaban*, though each novel contains elements that move beyond the school story and heroic fantasy, it cannot be denied that these are the two genres that monopolize the structure of the books. This is especially true if these novels are viewed as being, at least for the most part, self-contained—a view of the novels that is, as we have seen previously, consistent with the approach of most of the series' early critics. In these first three novels, the actions and events of the narrative and the behavior of its characters are, though not entirely predictable, at least not wholly unexpected. For instance, in *Philosopher's Stone*, Harry's successful completion of a set of tasks in order to gain access to the Stone recalls the familiar "testing" of heroes that occurs, for example, in Arthurian legend; similarly in *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry's fight with the basilisk underlines his connection to the dragon-slayers that are so frequently a part of heroic fantasies. In *Philosopher's Stone*, Harry's rivalry with Draco Malfoy resembles many episodes of hero-bully dramas that occurred in Charles Hamilton's (alias Frank Richards) Greyfriar's School stories that appeared in the weekly boys' paper, *The Magnet*. In *Chamber of Secrets,* Harry's initial admiration of Tom Riddle and the ultimate revelation of the latter's duplicity also recalls the familiar trope of employing characters with double lives to dupe the hero, such as is depicted by the Greyfriar boys' admiration of the handsome and popular Dick Lancaster who turns out to be a member of a

criminal gang of burglars and goes by the alias the "Wizard[462]."[463] In both of these books,

Harry's defeat of Voldemort's henchman and Slytherin's heir are in keeping with the pattern

of heroic fantasy that predetermines the hero's triumph over his enemy and his/her success

at keeping evil at bay.

Even in the three earliest books, however, the reader can detect some variances with

the familiar paradigms that are not simply the peculiarities of a modernized version of these

genres, but instead indicative of a more complex narrative strategy. For instance, when we

examine *Chamber of Secrets* as a part of the larger narrative, we find evidence that while

Rowling indeed evokes the paradigm of heroic fantasy when Harry slays the basilisk and

defeats Tom Riddle in Slytherin's chamber, she also complicates the model by embedding

yet another narrative thread within that familiar literary episode: we learn from Dumbledore

in the sixth installment that Tom Riddle's diary was actually one of Voldemort's first

Horcruxes in which he had encased part of his soul. The destruction of the seven Horcruxes

becomes the dominant concern of the last two books in the series, but unbeknownst to the

reader or to the protagonist Rowling had begun this narrative thread three installments (and

for Harry, three years) earlier, indicating that her narrative does not follow a straightforward

trajectory and that Harry must reevaluate his actions, decisions, and role.

Additionally, in *Prisoner of Azkaban* Rowling begins to deviate from the expected

operations of both the school story and heroic fantasy. For example, though her

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[462] Not only is it interesting that Lancaster's gang name is the "Wizard," but it is also perhaps not coincidental that his specialty is "safe-cracking": Tom Riddle keeps Slytherin's monster in the bowels of the school, a secure hiding place only reachable if one can figure out how to open the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets. Other than Tom Riddle and Slytherin himself, Harry, Ron, and Hermione are the only people ever able to "crack" into the Slytherin's supposed safe hiding place.

[463] *Magnets* #1209-#1219

characterization up until *Prisoner of Azkaban* seems dependent upon the familiar archetypes

of these two genres,[464] in this third installment Rowling shows signs of rejecting any

simplification of her characters' identities. Remus Lupin, for instance, though he fulfills the

role of kindly schoolmaster and becomes a mentor to Harry, is also revealed to have a darker

side to his nature. As a werewolf, once a month Lupin's integrity and noble spirit are

replaced by animal instinct and he becomes a danger to himself and to his friends. What is

more, from the moment his double nature is revealed, rather than excuse Lupin's "furry little

problem," Rowling allows her reader insight into the psychological struggle that her

character continuously undergoes every full moon and, indeed, every day of his life. As an

outcast to wizard society because of his "illness," Lupin understands the anger and

resentment felt by other werewolves that inspire their hatred of the prejudiced wizarding

community. His own shame about his condition and his resolve to leave his wife and

unborn child in an effort to distance them from the disapprobation of the wizarding

community is at once heartbreaking and infuriating. The reader, like Harry, feels pity for

Lupin, but also anger at Lupin's cowardice when he attempts to join Harry, Ron, and

Hermione in their quest for the Horcruxes rather than remain with Tonks. This complicated

decision sheds light on the internal moral struggle of a character who, in any other school

story narrative, would always choose the right path. Mr. Chipping, in James Hilton's

Goodbye Mr. Chips (1934), provides a contrasting example of an admired and inspiring

educator who is unfailingly moral and always beyond petty politics. Lupin, on the other

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[464] Though, when reading the novels after the series completion, the reader becomes more aware of the complexity of, for example, Minerva McGonagall's or the Bloody Baron's identities. It is in retrospect that we realize that some of these characters' earliest dialogues, or their modes of address, or their behaviors are due to the peculiarities of their personalities or their personal histories which are only illuminated later in the series.

hand, becomes deeply embroiled in the fight against Voldemort, and though his commitment to the Order of the Phoenix never wavers, at certain times in the narrative, Harry and the reader witness the way in which Lupin's character and principles are negatively impacted by his experiences. For instance, after the Battle of the Seven Potters[465], Lupin castigates Harry for disarming rather than cursing Stan Shunpike, a merciful move that betrayed Harry's location to the Death Eaters. This rebuke comes as a surprise to both Harry and the reader because up until this point in the narrative Lupin has been, if not a pacifist, at least a proponent for defensive rather than offensive maneuvers.[466]

The prisoner of Azkaban himself, Sirius Black, is, of course, another notable example of a character who does not fulfill the traditional role that is prescribed by his genre. Mistaken for a traitor and a murderer, Harry's godfather seems at first as dark a wizard as his name implies and his innocence is only discovered when Harry, Ron, and Hermione uncover the truth about Peter Pettigrew. This revelation is unexpected and surprises both Harry and the reader, but it is again the way Rowling complicates Black's nature that elevates her characterization of Sirius above the mentor figure archetype. At first, Sirius can do no wrong in Harry's eyes; he is courageous, selfless, intelligent, and loyal. What is more, he and Harry share an enemy in Severus Snape and initially Sirius's insults concerning the Potions master seem both humorous and appropriate for the ill-tempered, resentful, and prejudiced Snape. As the series progresses, however, Harry begins,

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[465] The Battle of the Seven Potters occurs at the beginning of *Deathly Hallows* and involves seven members of the Order of the Phoenix taking Polyjuice Potion to act as decoys so the real Harry can escape from Privet Drive.

[466] Even when Lupin and Sirius Black resolve to kill Peter Pettigrew together in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, it is only after Pettigrew's guilt in betraying and killing their best friend is undeniably proven.

albeit reluctantly, to question his godfather's behavior. When Harry sees Sirius's and his father's treatment of the teenaged Severus Snape in the Pensieve, the casual cruelty he witnesses both shocks and troubles him. Additionally, Sirius's behavior toward his house-elf, Kreacher, reveals a streak of arrogance and prejudice in Black's nature that Harry cannot deny or excuse. After all, it was Sirius who told Harry, Ron, and Hermione in *Goblet of Fire* that the way a person treats his inferiors is revelatory of his nature. Though Harry initially tries to justify Sirius's neglectful and sometimes borderline abusive behavior toward Kreacher, citing Kreacher's sympathy for the Dark Arts as Sirius's excuse, by the seventh installment it becomes clear to Harry that his godfather was a noble but also flawed human being. Therefore, after Harry learns of the great tragedy[467] of Kreacher's life in *Deathly Hallows*, he is sympathetic and generous towards him, refusing to model his behavior after that of Sirius.

It is Rowling's fourth installment, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, in which the patterns and repetitions that structured the first three books begin to noticeably give way to another kind of storytelling. *Goblet of Fire* begins in the same manner as the first three installments, with Harry bored and oppressed in his home with the Dursleys and eagerly anticipating his return to Hogwarts. In this book, as in *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry is invited to the Weasley home, with the added pleasure of being invited to attend the Quidditch World Cup. With this magical event, for almost the first time in the series (and certainly for the most prolonged period thus far in the narrative), Rowling moves the drama out of the

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[467] Kreacher witnessed the death of Regulus Black when he attempted to remove Voldemort's Horcrux from the cave. Before he died, Regulus charged Kreacher not to tell anyone in the Black family what had happened to him and ordered him to destroy the Horcrux, but despite his most desperate efforts, he could not do it and, additionally, had to silently witness the grief of his family over Regulus's disappearance and death.

school and into the wider world. In this way, Rowling displays the wizarding world as being incredibly proximate to the Muggle world and intimates how difficult it is for the two communities to remain mutually exclusive from one another. Throughout this fourth book, there exists for both Harry and the reader a tension between the familiar and the unexpected that mirrors this relationship between the real and the marvelous. The World Cup match itself, for example, is something of which Harry finds that he is both knowledgeable and ignorant, being very familiar with the game as Seeker for Gryffindor House, but also being in almost total ignorance of the sport's history or its popularity in other wizarding communities throughout the globe—and, indeed, even the very existence of these other communities ("It was only just dawning on Harry how many witches and wizards there must be in the world; he had never really thought much about those in other countries."[468]). Here, Harry and the reader are both forced to reevaluate their knowledge of the wizarding world's boundaries and concerns.

An even more telling example of the tension between the expected and the unexpected occurs in the aftermath of the match. Initially, all seems as it was before: because Harry supports the Irish team and because, after all, this is a British story, it is not surprising that Ireland wins the Cup. The climate of triumph and celebration that occurred in the last installment when Harry helped his own Quidditch team to victory is here repeated in the World Cup camp. Harry and the Weasleys return to their tents and Harry dreams of achieving a similar kind of sporting success as he falls asleep. But rather than continuing with a peaceful dénouement before the children's return to Hogwarts and its grounds (where most of the significant action of the previous books had been hitherto confined), Rowling

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[468] Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 81.

instead immediately introduces a threat in the outside world in the form of the Death Eaters.[469] Forced to flee as Voldemort's supporters terrorize the camp, Harry's powerlessness to do anything to stop the Death Eaters from torturing the Roberts family and the way he must hide in the forest with Ron and Hermione is a stark contrast to his fight with the Dementors earlier that spring in *Prisoner of Azkaban*.

Additionally, the accusations of Mr. Crouch and the injustice of the man's callous dismissal of his blameless and frightened house elf, Winky, also inaugurate a change in the way "good" characters are portrayed in the series and how justice operates in the narrative. Because of his experience with Dobby and the Malfoys, Harry and the reader are familiar with the bad treatment of house elves by Dark wizards. This is the first time, however, that Harry witnesses cruelty to this race of beings by a person who is undeniably committed to fighting the Dark Arts. With Mr. Bartemius Crouch, Sr., Rowling introduces a complexity in the characterization of "good" wizards that was absent in the earlier novels. Harry learns that Bartemius Crouch, Sr. was zealously committed to the eradication of the Dark Arts and its followers during the First Wizarding War, but that his unyielding temperament resulted in severe punishments and oftentimes a blatant mismanagement of the justice system, as in the case of the innocent Sirius Black who was sent to Azkaban without a trial and, most

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[469] She also, in portraying their actions toward the Roberts family, highlights the tension that exists in the wizarding community about the treatment of Muggles. Indeed, though Harry and the reader had been made aware of the prejudice against Muggles and Muggle-born wizards since the first installment, he has never witnessed any violent action instigated by this issue. In depicting the torture of the Roberts family, Rowling also calls attention to the more subtle forms of prejudice that even the most well-intentioned wizards display when dealing with Muggles: at the beginning of their stay, the frequently obliviated Mr. Roberts was portrayed as a comical figure (in the way that Muggles had often been viewed as wizards in the series: ignorant but amiable), but his and his family's torture at the hands of the Death Eaters casts a sobering light over wizards' view of Muggle inferiority for the first time.

importantly for this novel, the case of Barty Crouch, Jr.[470] Mr. Crouch, Sr. therefore can be seen as a kind of Robespierre and this ambivalence about his character moves beyond the black and white vision of "good" and "bad" wizards. Winky's story also thwarts what could be considered the childish or schoolboy idea of justice that was present in *Philosopher's Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets* in which good behavior was ultimately rewarded. Though Harry, Ron, and Hermione suffered occasional injustices such as losing House points for helping Hagrid with Norbert or because they were simply the target of Professor Snape's ire, at the end of each of these books Harry is always rewarded: In *Chamber of Secrets*, Dobby's appalling treatment at the hands of the Malfoys was remedied by Harry when he set Dobby free; Harry also restored justice when he exonerated the falsely accused Hagrid from being the person who opened the Chamber of Secrets. Even in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, though Sirius is not publicly exonerated for Wormtail's crimes, his life and soul are spared from the Dementors, Buckbeak's life is restored, and Harry returns to the Dursleys with an ace in his pocket that he has a convicted murderer for a godfather who will object to Harry's abuse by his foster family. In *Goblet of Fire*, however, there is no justice for Winky. Despite Hermione's objections to her treatment and her protestations of Winky's innocence, Winky is unceremoniously sacked from her position. And what is more, for the first time in the series, an unjust situation is never remedied. Instead Winky, forced to leave Mr. Crouch and work in the Hogwarts kitchens, is reduced to a life of misery and alcoholism.[471]

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[470] Barty Crouch, Jr. was also sent to Azkaban by his father, Barty Crouch, Sr., even though his involvement in the torture of the Longbottoms was not certain at the time he was tried by the Wizengamot.

[471] It also adds to the surprise that the incident is viewed even by the kindly Mr. Weasley as regrettable, but also none of his business.

Later, when Harry arrives at Hogwarts, it seems that the narrative has returned to following its usual course as Harry, after having missed the opening feast two years in a row, settles into his place at the Gryffindor table, witnesses the Sorting, engages with his fellow students and the ghosts, and wonders the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher will be. These repetitions restore the pattern to which we have grown accustomed in the first three books. But when Dumbledore takes his customary place at the podium, the Headmaster's welcoming speech introduces a change in the way the novel will be structured: Quidditch has been canceled for the year because Hogwarts will play host to The Triwizard Tournament for the first time in over a century. This change illustrates the way Rowling continues to play with the reader's expectations, at once evoking the school story framework with certain patterns and repetitions from the previous novels—like, for example, the continuing animosity between Harry and Draco, the familiar yearly problem with Hagrid's deadly creatures (this time, blast-ended screwts), and the Weasley twins' incurable mischief making—but ultimately reworking the overarching narrative so that it becomes almost unrecognizable.

For example, at first the turn of events involving the Triwizard Tournament seem to be merely an equal substitution for the excitement, preparation, and spectacle of the Quidditch matches that were an integral part of the first three novels. Consequently, it can be assumed that the competitive nature of the tasks would allow the fourth novel to retain the emphasis on sport that ties the series to the tradition of the school story. Indeed, when facing the dragon in the first task Harry repeats to himself: 'This was just another Quidditch match, that was all… just another Quidditch match and the Horntail was just another ugly

opposing team.'[472] What is more, each stage of the tournament involves a combination of elements—physical strength or dexterity, quests, and magical/mythical tasks—that blend the school story and heroic fantasy. The first task requires Harry to capture a dragon's golden egg, recalling heroic fantasies like *The Hobbit* (Bilbo's recovering the Arkenstone from the dragon Smaug), myths like "Jason and the Golden Fleece," as well as fairy tales like "Jack and the Beanstalk." The nature of the second task must be deciphered in advance and requires that the champions use their magical education to find a way of breathing underwater and employ their courage and cunning in order to save their captive friends. In this task, Harry encounters magical creatures familiar to the children's literature category such as mermaids and water demons. The third task is a maze, recalling, of course, the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. But this final task also, thanks to the presence of Acromantulas, a Sphinx, upside-down passages in the shrubbery, and the goblet of fire at the center, suggests a connection with such stories as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and Sir Galahad's quest for the Holy Grail.

It is partly because of these similarities to previous fantasy fictions and narratives for children that it seems preordained that Harry will not only succeed in each of the tasks, but will outstrip the other champions and win the Triwizard Cup, a success that would also mirror his triumph as Seeker for Gryffindor in the previous year, his triumph against the basilisk in his second year, and his defeat of Quirrell and Gryffindor's subsequent winning of the House Cup in *Philosopher's Stone*, as well as the victory of his preferred Quidditch team earlier in this novel. Indeed, Harry's triumph in the first task affirms this assumption as he ties for first place with Viktor Krum. Ron voices the change in the reader's

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[472] Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 354.

expectations when he says to Harry directly after the first task: 'Harry […] whoever put your name in that goblet – I – I reckon they're trying to do you in!' The next day, however, he claims: 'You know what? I reckon you could win this tournament, Harry. I'm serious.'[473] The initial fear that Harry's name was put into the goblet as an attempt on his life is therefore diminished, not because the threat of death during the rest of the tournament does not persist (as Sirius reminds him, he still has two more tasks to complete), but because previous patterns allow the reader to assume that Harry will foil any such plans through luck, integrity, and courage as he has so often done in the previous three installments. This hypothesis proves correct when in the second task his friendship with Dobby saves him from embarrassment in the nick of time and his demonstration of "moral fibre" in saving the hostages secures his tie for first place with Cedric. When reading these chapters for the first time with Rowling's previous novels in mind, it seems perhaps that she thwarts Harry's success just enough to allow us to assume that Harry's outright victory will only come to pass at the very end of the tournament. But in hindsight, we see that Harry has only achieved the success he has been accredited in the tournament because of someone else's cleverly laid plans and that we, like Harry, like Dumbledore, and like the rest of the participants and spectators of the tournament, have been duped. Book Four, like the maze, was too easy, was too *predictable*, to be true.

When Harry finally reaches the Cup at the center of the maze, the reader expects a victorious moment. After all, Harry has passed through the labyrinth's obstacles not without the difficulty that has been anticipated by the reader as necessary for him to earn his trophy: though he first found that the paths he chose were strangely empty, Harry did eventually

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[473] Ibid., 364.

encounter fantastic beasts, riddles, and bizarre liminal spaces that put his skills to the test. What is more, the drama involving the violent Viktor Krum[474] and the fight with the giant Acromantula left Harry stunned, injured, and in danger of finishing in second place were it not for Cedric Diggory's sense of honor. Harry's decision to give up the Cup to Cedric because he cannot run on his broken leg and then, at Cedric's stubborn demurral, Harry's offer for the two boys to take the cup together as a joint Hogwarts victory appear to the reader to be the physical and emotional struggle requisite for Harry to end his fourth year at Hogwarts, like his three previous years, in triumph. Indeed, the moment where Harry sacrifices his solo victory in order to save Cedric from the giant spider recalls the selfless actions of countless heroes in the fantasy tradition. Likewise the dialogue in which Cedric and Harry discuss who should be champion epitomizes the school story's theme of good sportsmanship. Traditionally, in the school story and in a heroic fantasy, both of these scenes would be followed by an exultant conclusion in which the hero/protagonist is celebrated by his community. But when Harry and Cedric touch the cup together, they are instead magically transported to another arena from which neither will return triumphantly.

The Triwizard Cup, we learn, had been transformed—unbeknownst to the champions or to anyone else at Hogwarts except the false Moody—into a portkey. In the scant two minutes it takes Harry and Cedric to realize that they are in a graveyard and that something might be wrong, Cedric is unceremoniously murdered by Voldemort via Wormtail ('Kill the spare!'). The shock of this moment, its finality, and the unexpected result of honor and sportsmanship leave both Harry and his reader stunned. Indeed,

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[474] We later learn from Barty Crouch, Jr. that he had used the Imperius Curse on Krum and thus the Durmstrang student was not responsible for his actions.

Rowling had never deviated so far from the traditional operations of heroic fantasy or the

school story and this moment, I argue, acts as a sort of railroad switch for the narrative's

trajectory as the series begins to greatly diverge from its expected, traditional track. As the

series progresses from this point, though the novels retain some of the traditional materials

and methods of the school story, heroic fantasy, and other children's fictions, they are

altered or transformed in such a way that they are no longer simplistic or predictable.

For example, the events that follow Cedric's death continue to provide links to the

heroic fantasy tradition. In an effort to conclusively prove his dominance, Lord Voldemort,

the evil villain returned to full strength and power, challenges the fourteen-year-old Harry,

the unlikely and inexperienced hero, to a duel that occurs within the bounds of a mythic

setting: a graveyard. Despite these familiar markers, the way in which the battle unfolds and

the reasons for Harry's "victory" undermine the traditional pattern. After witnessing

Cedric's murder, for the first time in the series when under threat Harry is too horrified to

act:

> For a second that contained an eternity, Harry stared into Cedric's
> face, at his open grey eyes, blank and expressionless as the
> windows of a deserted house, at his half-open mouth, which looked
> slightly surprised. And then, before Harry's mind had accepted
> what he was seeing, before he could feel anything but numb
> disbelief, he felt himself being pulled to his feet.[475]

Here, the narrative style moves quickly from the sweeping, elevated style of the epic ("a

second that contained an eternity") to the laborious, descriptive style that characterizes stark

realism or even naturalism ("open grey eyes, blank and expressionless," "half-open mouth

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[475] Ibid., 638.

which looked slightly surprised"). Instead of glorifying the description of Cedric's body, Rowling employs the plebeian imagery of a deserted house. Harry is also neither angry nor vengeful as we might expect a hero to be (as, for example, in *The Illiad* Achilles was both enraged and immediately desirous of revenge at the death of Patroclus), but rather he is unidealistically described as being completely numb. This emotional detachment allows him to be easily overtaken by Wormtail who ties Harry to a gravestone and, at the behest of Voldemort, cuts Harry's arm to take his blood, a necessary ingredient for Voldemort's regeneration spell. Not only is Harry powerless because he is physically restrained, but Rowling's description of his passivity in these moments brings a real awareness to Harry's youth and inexperience. The only active power left to him is his sight, a power which he rejects as he closes his eyes rather than see Wormtail cut off his own hand:

> Harry realized what Wormtail was about to do a second before it happened – he closed his eyes as tightly as he could, but he could not block the scream that pierced the night, that went through Harry as though he had been stabbed with the dagger, too. He heard something fall to the ground, heard Wormtail's anguished panting, then a sickening splash, as something was dropped into the cauldron. Harry couldn't stand to look … but the potion had turned a burning red; the light of it shone through Harry's closed eyelids….[476]

The reader knows that Harry is aware that the "something" is actually Wormtail's severed hand, but the way that Rowling admits that Harry cannot bring himself to think the word "hand" demonstrates a rejection of the stereotype of the conventional hero: Harry is not behaving heroically, instead he is behaving as a young, scared boy would behave in this circumstance, wishing in vain for things to go wrong in his enemy's plans and trying to deny

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[476] Ibid., 642.

the reality of his situation out of fear rather than, perhaps, cleverly trying to find a way to escape or boldly defying his captor by refusing to look away.

Despite Harry's initial passivity, the battle between Harry and Voldemort seems at first to return the narrative to the heroic fantasy mode. Voldemort, wanting to prove his dominance, gives Harry back his wand and challenges him to a duel in the graveyard with the circle of Death Eaters marking the perimeter of the battleground.[477] Harry's wand overpowers that of Voldemort and the battleground becomes a sacred space when the spells collide and a protective circle is cast around Harry by the "ghosts" of Voldemort's victims. But here again Rowling rejects the conventional methods of heroic fantasy. Harry "wins" the fight and manages to retrieve the portkey that will take him back to Hogwarts, but it is clear that the losses he sustains in the graveyard are greater than what he achieves: the innocent Cedric is dead despite the brief appearance of his shade, and the irrevocableness of this fact is driven home by the way Harry clings to Cedric's heavy, lifeless body after he is returned to the maze. Additionally, the loss of his own blood is a terrible blow in that it not only helped Voldemort return to full power, but it also strips Harry of the magical protection incurred by Lily Potter's sacrifice that existed in Harry's body, a protection which prevented Lord Voldemort's being able to touch him. In this way, though Harry technically wins the duel, it is evident that his managing to return to Hogwarts alive is not actually a victory but merely a temporary escape—temporary because Harry knows that Voldemort has returned

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[477] Because the two wands were made with the phoenix feather core from the same phoenix (Fawkes, Dumbledore's pet) and because the two spells (Voldemort's *Avada Kedavra* curse and Harry's *Expelliarmus* charm) are cast at the same time, the spells collide and spontaneously cast another spell, *Priori Incantatem*, which will cause whichever wand is overpowered to regurgitate its last spells.

to power and will continue to hunt him, and temporary because of what happens next in the narrative.

Even after Harry escapes Voldemort and the Death Eaters, upon returning to the maze and then to Hogwarts he is immediately kidnapped by the false Moody and his life is threatened albeit in a less dramatic but no less malevolent way. It is only when the false Moody reveals to Harry that he is the spy that we realize the trap that we have fallen into as Harry's readers. We, like Harry, believed his successes in the tournament were won by courage, luck, and integrity and that, in so triumphing, he was thwarting the evil plans of the person who put Harry's name in the Goblet of Fire. Instead, we now realize that Harry only made it to the third task thanks to the sinister and carefully executed plans of Barty Crouch, Jr. (disguised by Polyjuice Potion as the grizzled ex-Auror[478] Alastor Moody) who helped Harry with every task. In this way, Rowling not only rejects the traditional operations of the hero's journey, but it could be argued that she even reproaches her readers for their desire for heroic fantasy, knowing that the reality of Harry's position as Hogwarts Champion is no cause for congratulation. Even his winnings, thrust hastily and unceremoniously at him by the harried Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, seem like blood money and Harry cannot bear to keep them. Instead, though it seems like there will be an attempt to restore the traditional pattern when Harry tries to give the money to Cedric's family, because the Diggorys also feel that they cannot accept the "winnings," the idea of the hero receiving

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[478] An Auror is a Dark wizard-catcher. The Aurors, who must go through extensive training and study, are part of an elite department in the Ministry of Magic. Alastor Moody was considered to be one of the greatest Aurors of all time, responsible for most of the captures of dark wizards during the First Wizarding War.

laurels or posthumous honor is thus revealed to be a hollow one when it is placed next to the reality of a dead seventeen-year-old boy.

As the series progresses through the next three books, a more complex narrative strategy than what Rowling's readers or critics had previously anticipated is revealed. In the fifth novel, heroic fantasy and the school story are pitted against realism and, in this way, reveal how Harry is both free and directed by fate. *Order of the Phoenix* begins with Harry being impatient to be included in the fight against Voldemort. Though the Ministry of Magic denies the Dark Lord's return, Harry and the members of Dumbledore's Order of the Phoenix know the truth and are committed to preventing his rise to power. However, despite his and the readers' expectations for Harry to be a strong presence in the anti-Voldemort movement, Harry is sidelined from the start. As in the previous novels, the summer is not uneventful; Harry and his cousin, Dudley, are attacked by Dementors near their home in Little Whinging, Surrey and Harry manages to save Dudley's soul in the nick of time. However, this time he is not praised for his quick reaction or ability to cast a Patronus. Instead, he finds that he is in trouble with the Ministry of Magic and, more unexpectedly, Dumbledore and the other Order members are also displeased and alarmed that Harry could not avoid provoking the government when they specifically warned him against it. They treat his actions not as something laudable (as they believed his actions to be when he saved Sirius from the Dementors), but as something that unfortunately had been done and now must be remedied.

The tone and pace of the rest of the novel display this tension between Harry's role as the Chosen One and the reality of his situation. Though Harry is impatient for action and believes he is ready to act as an adult and a hero, he is continuously frustrated by his

exclusion from the Order and his efforts are repeatedly suppressed by the tyranny of Dolores

Umbridge. The structure of the novel reflects Harry's attitude of impatience as it takes over

one hundred pages for Harry to even reach Hogwarts and, once at school, his persistent

dreams about walking down the corridor to the Department of Mysteries, his repetitive

arguments with Umbridge and his drawn-out punishments, and his awkward and unexciting

relationship with the irritating Cho Chang seem to slow the progress of the story. Though he

expects, as the marked enemy of Lord Voldemort, to play an important and even dramatic

role in the resistance, he never receives the respect or the attention that, in spite of himself,

he has come to expect. Even his role as the protagonist of a school story is undermined

when a letter arrives from Hogwarts announcing that Ron, and not Harry, will be the male

prefect of Gryffindor House.   Additionally, he is furious that he had to remain at Privet

Drive while Ron and Hermione were able to live at Grimmauld Place; he lashes out at them

in his anger:

> 'SO YOU HAVEN'T BEEN IN THE MEETINGS, BIG
> DEAL! YOU'VE STILL BEEN HERE, HAVEN'T YOU?
> YOU'VE STILL BEEN TOGETHER! ME, I'VE BEEN STUCK
> AT THE DURSLEYS' FOR A MONTH! AND I'VE HANDLED
> MORE THAN YOU TWO'VE EVER MANAGED AND
> DUMBLEDORE KNOWS IT – WHO SAVED THE
> PHILOSOPHER'S STONE? WHO GOT RID OF RIDDLE?
> WHO SAVED BOTH YOUR SKINS FROM THE
> DEMENTORS?'[479]

Here, Harry reveals his expectation that he will be treated differently than the rest of the

young people involved in the anti-Voldemort movement despite the fact that he is the same

age or younger than Hermione and most of the Weasleys. Because of his heroic actions in

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[479] Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 63.

the earlier novels and his identity as Voldemort's targeted enemy, Harry assumes that he can handle more than an average teenager. But the events that occur throughout the rest of the fifth installment undercut Harry's role as the hero of the story. Ironically, at times it is Harry's own behavior that sabotages his heroic fantasy role: not only does he spend much of the novel brooding, complaining, and, as Hermione puts it, feeling "misunderstood," but his reckless behavior also betrays his immaturity and inexperience. Each time Harry tries to act heroically, the results of his actions do not live up to the reader's or Harry's own expectations. For example, when Harry speaks out and defies Umbridge's assertions that Voldemort has not returned, bravely telling the truth,[480] he is not only severely punished by Umbridge, but Professor McGonagall also rebukes Harry for his lack of wisdom and caution. Additionally, though we assume that the creation of Dumbledore's Army is a courageous attempt by the students of Hogwarts to contribute to the efforts of the Order of the Phoenix, the consequence of this act of rebellion is that the Ministry is able to sack Dumbledore from his position as Headmaster.[481]

But it is at the end of the novel that Rowling's narrative more transparently reproaches Harry and the reader's assumption that Harry is the undefeatable hero of a children's fantasy novel. Because Harry, frustrated by his inability to do Occlumency and, more importantly, curious to discover what awaits behind the door in his dreams, ignores the instructions of Snape, he consciously allows Voldemort to enter his mind against the express

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[480] Telling the truth is one of the traditional markers of the hero.

[481] Additionally, Harry ignores the Occlumency lessons that Dumbledore deems necessary for him to fight Voldemort, too curious to find out the mystery (as he was in *Philosopher's Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets*). He is also too impatient for action (as he was in *Goblet of Fire*) to prepare himself in this slow manner. When he finds out he actually *is* the Chosen One, Harry does not feel vindicated, but miserable.

wishes of Dumbledore and the rest of the Order. At first, it seems that his curiosity and

willingness to brave this risk will be rewarded when Harry dreams that Voldemort has

captured and is torturing Sirius in the Department of Mysteries. This time, however, the

qualities that have made him a hero in the earlier novels—his relentless curiosity, his quick

thinking, his readiness to endanger his own life to save others, and his leadership abilities—

are now the direct cause of other peoples' suffering and death. Even when Hermione warns

him that Voldemort might be exploiting his knowledge of Harry's tendency to "act the

hero," Harry refuses to believe that the reality of the situation might be at odds with his idea

of what is happening and what he must do:

> 'You … this isn't a criticism, Harry! But you do … sort of
> … I mean – don't you think you've got a bit of a – a – *saving-
> people thing*?' she said.
> He glared at her.
> 'And what's that supposed to mean, a "saving-people
> thing"?'
> 'Well … you …' she looked more apprehensive than ever.
> 'I mean … last year, for instance … in the lake … during the
> Tournament … you shouldn't have … I mean, you didn't need to
> save that little Delacour girl … you got a bit … carried away …'
> […]
> 'I'm trying to say – Voldemort knows you, Harry! He took
> Ginny down into the Chamber of Secrets to lure you there, it's the
> kind of thing he does, he knows you're the – the sort of person
> who'd go to Sirius's aid! What if he's just trying to get *you* into
> the Department of Myst—?'
> 'Hermione, it doesn't matter if he's done it to get me there
> or not – they've taken McGonagall to St. Mungo's, there isn't
> anyone from the Order left at Hogwarts who we can tell, and if we
> don't go, Sirius is dead!'
> 'But Harry – what if your dream was – was just that, a
> dream?'
> Harry let out a roar of frustration. Hermione actually
> stepped back from him, looking alarmed.
> 'You don't get it!' Harry shouted at her, 'I'm not having
> nightmares, I'm not just dreaming! What d'you think all the
> Occlumency was for, why d'you think Dumbledore wanted me

> prevented from seeing these things? Because they're REAL,
> Hermione – Sirius is trapped, I've seen him. Voldemort's got him,
> and no one else knows, and that means we're the only ones who
> can save him, and if you don't want to do it, fine, but I'm going,
> understand? And if I remember rightly, you didn't have a problem
> with my *saving-people thing* when it was you I was saving from
> the Dementors, or –' he rounded on Ron ' – when it was your sister
> I was saving from the Basilisk –'[482]

Here, Hermione accurately assesses Harry's dream as an illusion and predicts exactly how

Voldemort might be attempting to trick Harry into coming to the Department of Mysteries.

Harry and the reader, however, anticipating heroic drama from the first pages of the book

and believing in the pattern that Rowling established with the previous novels, cannot be

convinced that Harry is mistaken in the rightness of his perspective. Here, Harry

emphasizes his own belief in the role that he is meant to play in the narrative by asserting

that his extraordinary experiences as Voldemort's nemesis (dreaming his dreams, reading

his thoughts, seeing through his snake) are more probable and more "REAL" than any other

mundane scenario and that he alone is able to recognize and stop Voldemort's plans ("there

isn't anyone… left," "we're the only ones"). However, when Harry arrives at the Ministry,

he realizes that Hermione's perspective was, in fact, the correct one: Voldemort did indeed

lure Harry to the Department through a false dream and his Occlumency lessons were not

intended to protect Harry from seeing reality, but to prevent him from believing in a false

reality. Sirius's death is thus not the result of Voldemort's capture, but is due to the fact that

Sirius must go to the Department of Mysteries to come to Harry's aid where he is killed in

the fight by Bellatrix Lestrange. Thus, Harry's determination to act heroically and to fit his

reality into the pattern of heroic fantasy actually results in disaster. Rowling further

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[482] Ibid., 646-647.

emphasizes the dissimilarity between her novels and other children's fantasy when the Ministry finally acknowledges that Harry was telling the truth that Voldemort had returned and when Dumbledore finally does tell Harry that he is the prophesied Chosen One. In both scenes, instead of feeling vindicated and proud, Harry is unable to feel anything but misery, regret, and dread.

The last two novels of the series continue to thwart the expectation of heroic fantasy and the school story by changing the way that the narrative is structured. Though heroic fantasy and school story elements reappear at times throughout *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows* (for example, Harry is made Quidditch Captain in the sixth book, and he escapes on the back of a dragon in the seventh book), the form, style, and concerns of these novels become more complex. *Half-Blood Prince*, for example, begins with two chapters that are not narrated from Harry's perspective. Instead, Rowling demonstrates just how much the wizarding world is encroaching on reality (the Muggle world) by giving us a glimpse into the Prime Minister's office and his ever-growing awareness of the wizarding community's issues. The second chapter again confounds expectations by giving us insight into the other side of the fight with a scene involving Narcissa Malfoy, Severus Snape, Bellatrix Lestrange, and Peter Pettigrew.   Additionally, the tone of the novel is subdued and Harry himself is much more solemn and thoughtful. Instead of being impatient and convinced of his own importance, he is instead resigned to feeling lonely at Privet Drive and is surprised when Dumbledore writes to tell him that he will be leaving after only a few short weeks. Much of the rest of the novel is composed of periods of reflection and planning rather than of action. Instead of teaching Harry complicated defensive spells or how to duel, Dumbledore's private lessons with Harry involve the careful study of

Voldemort's memories. Even the task that Harry is given involving the retrieval of a memory from Horace Slughorn is not dangerous or physically difficult. Instead, Harry must strategize and delicately negotiate in order to convince Slughorn to give him the true recollection. When Harry does make one attempt to be a hero by trying to discover Draco Malfoy's plans, he eventually realizes that he was wrong to disobey Dumbledore; not only was Dumbledore aware of Malfoy's attempts on his life, but he was purposefully ignoring them in order to protect Draco from Voldemort. Similarly, when he impulsively chases Severus Snape after Dumbledore's death and tries to injure him with spells he learned from the Half-Blood Prince, his spells are blocked by Snape who, unlike Harry, had achieved mastery over magical language through effort and study. Heroism in this book, then, involves a seriousness of purpose rather than impulsive courageous action.

Deathly Hallows further separates Rowling's novels from heroic fantasy and the school story moving all of the action (except for the final battle) outside the Hogwarts grounds, and, indeed, for much of the novel, outside the wizarding world. Additionally, though the task that Harry, Ron, and Hermione have been set recalls other quests in high fantasy like the quest for the Holy Grail and Frodo's quest to destroy the Ring of Power, Rowling shows us the reality of the hero's journey. Instead of compressing their long search and plans into a few pages in order to focus the narrative attention on the dramatic events that occur with each Horcrux's destruction, the majority of the book is spent in a shabby tent that smells of cats. Harry, Ron, and Hermione are exhausted, frequently half-starved, cold, uncomfortable and, most unexpectedly, bored. Despite their special mission to destroy the Horcruxes, they are frequently stymied by their lack of knowledge and the necessity to hide. Ron is especially affected by the tedium and by the lack of food. The glamour implied by

other writers of fantasy when their characters "live off the land" as they journey is here

absent. Instead of the delicious meals of fish that the Pevensie children enjoyed on their

journey through Narnia, Hermione's mushrooms, stewed in a billycan, are described as

"rubbery" and their fish is "charred" and "grey." When he is injured in their escape from

the Ministry, Ron's wounds do not miraculously heal with the application of a magical

salve, but instead he loses a dangerous amount of blood and is in pain for weeks. Rowling's

description of Ron's increasing impatience is therefore more in line with the reality of his

situation. He has the time to brood, and consequently he grows increasingly miserable and

jealous, lashing out at Harry for not meeting his expectations:

> 'It's not like I'm having the time of my life here,' said Ron, 'you know, with my arm mangled and nothing to eat and freezing my backside off every night. I just hoped, you know, after we'd been running around a few weeks, we'd have achieved something.'
> 'Ron,' Hermione said, but in such a quiet voice that Ron could pretend not to have heard it over the loud tattoo the rain was now beating on the tent.
> 'I thought you knew what you signed up for,' said Harry.
> 'Yeah, I thought I did too.'
> 'So what part of it isn't living up to your expectations?' asked Harry. Anger was coming to his defence now. 'Did you think we'd be staying in five star hotels? Finding a Horcrux every other day? Did you think you'd be back to Mummy by Christmas?'
> 'We thought you knew what you were doing!' shouted Ron, standing up; and his words pierced Harry like scalding knives. 'We thought Dumbledore has told you what to do, we thought you had a real plan!'[483]

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[483] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 252.

In this novel, Rowling gives her heroes no relief and thus Ron's decision to abandon the quest is much more believable than the cheerful (or at least uncomplaining) behavior of other children's literature characters or high fantasy characters in his situation.

With the exception of the events at Godric's Hollow, Malfoy Manner, Gringotts, and the final battle at Hogwarts, the rest of the novel continues to reject the familiar trajectories of other fantasy and school story narratives. Ironically, while the trio is on the run, hiding from Death Eaters and Snatchers, the other students of Hogwarts actually take up the heroic role that Harry had abandoned. Ginny, Neville, and Luna are the leaders of a rebellion against Headmaster Severus Snape and it is actually Neville, the not-Chosen One,[484] who defeats the last Horcrux. Finally, at the end of the novel, Harry's most heroic "act" is actually a non-action. When he learns that he is one of the Horcruxes, Harry walks into the Forbidden Forest and allows Voldemort to kill him. In the scene when he realizes that he must die, Rowling shows us just how inadequate heroic fantasy is to the reality of Harry's experience:

> Yet it did not occur to him now to try to escape, to outrun
> Voldemort. It was over, he knew it, and all that was left was the
> thing itself: dying.
> If only he could have died on that summer's night when he
> had left number four, Privet Drive for the last time, when the noble
> phoenix feather wand had saved him! If he could only have died
> like Hedwig, so quickly he would not have known it had
> happened! Or if he could have launched himself in front of a wand
> to save someone he loved … he envied even his parents' deaths
> now. This cold-blooded walk to his own destruction would require
> a different kind of bravery. He felt his fingers trembling slightly

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[484] Neville Longbottom could have been the boy in the prophesy because he, too, was born at the end of July to parents who had thrice defied Voldemort. However, for reasons best known to himself, Voldemort believed the prophesy referred to Harry.

and made an effort to control them, although no one could see him;
the portraits on the walls were all empty.[485]

Harry's wish for a heroic death and his acknowledgment of its impossibility in his circumstances demonstrates a final rejection of high fantasy for realism. The language of this passage moves the reader from the epic ("noble phoenix feather wand," "launched himself… to save someone he loved") to the ordinary ("cold-blooded walk," "fingers trembling slightly") as Harry moves from one kind of bravery to another. Even in the final battle, when he returns to life and must fight Voldemort in the Great Hall, Harry again chooses a defensive rather than an offensive spell. Thus, through the changes in the narrative's structure, style, and concerns, Rowling deviates from the expected operations of both the school story and heroic fantasy in order to create a more believable fictional reality.

A Change of Character

In the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh installments of the *Harry Potter* series, not only does the structural framework of the story deviate from conventional patterns, but its characterization also undergoes a simultaneous change. With Barty Crouch, Jr., Rowling introduces a more complex and convincing villain than we have hitherto seen. At first glance, the character of the false Alastor Moody seems to imitate the dark double of Professor Quirrell and, indeed, it is definitely a surprise when the most committed, famous Auror turns out to be in league with Voldemort: "Harry stared at Moody. He just didn't see how this could be.… Dumbledore's friend, the famous Auror … the one who had caught so

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[485] Ibid., 555.

many Death Eaters … It made no sense … no sense at all…."[486] Harry's disbelief when the

false Moody tells him that he has been in league with Voldemort mirrors our own, but it also

mirrors his disbelief in *Philosopher's Stone* when it turns out to be Professor Quirrell, not

Professor Snape, who has been trying to steal the stone: "Harry couldn't take it in. This

couldn't be true, it couldn't."[487] But in this book, it is not simply a case of mistaken blame,

but mistaken identity. With the false Moody's confession, Rowling derails both Harry's and

the reader's expectations and complicates her narrative still further. Alastor Moody, unlike

Quirinus Quirrell, is not really the spy. Instead, Moody is actually being impersonated (by

way of Polyjuice Potion, a brew introduced in *Chamber of Secrets*), by a Death Eater, Barty

Crouch, Jr., who has been assumed dead for over eleven years.

But, again, this complication does not necessarily deviate from previous fictions for

children, heroic fantasy, or even mythology. After all, how many times in *The Odyssey* does

Athena impersonate another character? Rather, it is the way Rowling has slowly illuminated

Barty Crouch, Jr.'s character throughout the narrative that elevates her characterization of

him above simplicity. We are first introduced to Barty Crouch, Jr. through Sirius Black's

account of his arrest and imprisonment in Azkaban by his own father, Barty Crouch, Sr.:

> "*Was* his son a Death Eater?" said Harry.
> "No idea," said Sirius, still stuffing down bread. "I was in
> Azkaban myself when he was brought in. This is mostly stuff I've
> found out since I got out. The boy was definitely caught in the
> company of people I'd bet my life were Death Eaters – but he
> might just have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, just like
> the house-elf."
> "Did Crouch try and get his son off?" Hermione whispered.
> Sirius let out a laugh that was much more like a bark.

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[486] Rowling, *Goblet of Fire,* 678.

[487] Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 288.

"Crouch let his son off? I thought you had the measure of him, Hermione! Anything that threatened to tarnish his reputation had to go; he had dedicated his whole life to becoming Minister of Magic. You saw him dismiss a devoted house-elf because she associated him with the Dark Mark again – doesn't that ell you what he's like? Crouch's fatherly affection stretched just far enough to give his son a trial, and by all accounts, it wasn't much more than an excuse for Crouch to show how much he hated the boy … then he sent him straight to Azkaban."

"He gave his own son to the dementors?" asked Harry quietly.

"That's right," said Sirius, and he didn't look remotely amused now. "I saw the dementors bringing him in, watched them through the bars in my cell door. He can't have been more than nineteen. They took him into a cell near mine. He was screaming for his mother by nightfall. He went quiet after a few days, though… they all went quiet in the end… except when they shrieked in their sleep…."[488]

By giving us a first-hand account of Barty Crouch, Jr.'s dubious guilt and experience in Azkaban, Rowling complicates Harry's and the reader's feelings toward a character who in any other circumstance, would be absolutely vilified because of the appalling heinousness of his crimes. By later allowing us access to the circumstances of his trial in the Pensieve, Harry's and the reader's sympathies are again torn. Harry learns that Barty Crouch, Jr. was convicted for torturing Frank and Alice Longbottom, the parents of his friend Neville, to insanity. If he is truly guilty of this crime against the Longbottoms, the baseness of his humanity must be abhorred. But if he was unjustly accused, his situation becomes profoundly pitiable, even tragic, knowing that he died of despair in Azkaban after only one year of imprisonment. The scene in the courtroom is therefore unnerving. Throughout the trial, Mr. Crouch, Sr.'s unyielding fury is contrasted with his son's desperate insistence upon his innocence:

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[488] Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 528-529.

But the boy was trying to fight off the dementors, even though Harry could see their cold, draining power starting to affect him. The crowd was jeering, some of them on their feet, as the woman swept out of the dungeon, and the boy continued to struggle.

"I'm your son!" he screamed up at Crouch. "I'm your son!"

"You are no son of mine!" bellowed Mr. Crouch, his eyes bulging suddenly. "I have no son!"

The wispy witch beside him gave a great gasp and slumped in her seat. She had fainted. Crouch appeared not to have noticed.

"Take them away!" Crouch roared at the dementors, spit flying from his mouth. "Take them away, and may they rot there!"

"Father! Father, I wasn't involved! No! No! Father, please!"[489]

When Barty Crouch, Jr. is forced to take Veritaserum and we learn that he has been in league with Lord Voldemort and did indeed help to torture the Longbottoms, Harry's and the reader's animosity toward the fanatical Barty Crouch, Jr. is again complicated by the way the man also describes his imprisonment and treatment by his father. Barty Crouch Jr. is thus depicted as both villain and victim. What is more, he is the victim of his own father, a person whose allegiance to the "right" side has never wavered. In this way Rowling adds yet another layer of complexity to her characterizations with Mr. Crouch, Sr. and what only can be described as his equally terrible and disastrous zeal to root out all of Voldemort's supporters.

In the fifth, sixth, and seventh installments we witness Rowling continue to deviate from the way in which individuals are conventionally characterized in heroic fantasies or school story narratives in order to make the population of the wizarding world more complex and believable. If we examine Rowling's method of characterization through the

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[489] Ibid., 596.

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lens of Virginia Woolf's argument, we see that though Rowling may have begun her series by employing archetypal characters, her purpose was to first introduce them to her audience in a way that permitted recognition and thus promoted intimacy between reader and character. As the novels progress, however, so too does our knowledge of each individual in Harry's world increase and we come to understand that the series as a whole is directed towards an ever more accurate appraisal of character. While at times her characters themselves change because of some event or choice that influences their selfhood or identity, often it is rather Harry's (and consequently, because we view the fictional world from Harry's perspective, the reader's) knowledge of these characters that undergoes change because he learns more about them through their actions, expressions, or decisions. Either way, as the series progresses, it becomes clear that it is the total census of characters which allows us to understand any one individual; each character is thus brought into focus by means of their relationship to the protagonist and, indeed, to the whole network of other characters within the bounds of the fictional world. Consequently, it is evident that their identities are not dependent upon what we initially assumed to be their prescribed roles (mentor, enemy, benevolent teacher, friend, rival, love interest, etc.) as they would be in other heroic fantasy novels, school stories, fairy tales, or mythologies. In this way, characters that the reader had assumed were static and limited by their archetypal roles are instead exposed by events or revealed by their choices to be, in actuality, dynamic, unpredictable, and, most importantly, believable. Thus, by undermining these initial assumptions about her characters' identities and roles in the narrative through a modification (or even a reversal, as we will see in the case of Severus Snape) of judgment, Rowling adds

a layer of complexity to her characterization that elevates her novels above conventional narratives for children.

For example, Rowling changes the way traditional mentors and enemies from heroic fantasy or school story narratives are portrayed in her series through particular episodes that modify or reverse both Harry's and the reader's judgments, feelings, and knowledge of these persons. In the beginning of the series, for instance, Harry's relationship with Draco Malfoy is the antagonistic relationship that exists between the hero and his rival. Not being able to construct an originary explanation of his character, both Harry and the reader lack some of the understanding that might tend toward sympathetic feelings. However, as Harry grows in knowledge, he also grows in sympathy and his relationship changes due to his increasing awareness of Draco's situation and struggle as the son of Death Eaters and then as a Death Eater himself. In the first novel, Harry's initial impressions of Draco at "Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions" and on the Hogwarts Express influence the way Harry perceives Draco's selfhood for the better part of six years. Because the reader is limited by Harry's perspective and because at this point in the narrative we expect the Harry Potter series to follow the conventions of the school story, Draco's actions, dialogue, and choices in the first novel all reveal him to be what we expect Harry's rival to be: arrogant, entitled, and a bully. Draco is Harry's equal and opposite, and thus that their animosity toward each other increases as each becomes more involved in his respective opposing side (anti-Voldemort and pro-Voldemort) is unsurprising. In *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry's hatred of Draco reaches new heights once Harry knows for certain[490] that Draco's father is a Death Eater and

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[490] Draco's father, Lucius Malfoy, was present and named by Voldemort in the graveyard of Little Hangleton in *Goblet of Fire*.

that Draco is proud of this fact. In this volume, Draco naturally joins forces with the

Dumbledore-hating Dolores Umbridge to try to find Dumbledore's Army's secret meeting

place, which, of course, increases Harry's and the reader's loathing of him.

Because of their hero-rival relationship, it then also comes as no surprise that this

hunter-prey storyline is mirrored in *Half-Blood Prince*, and that it is Harry's turn to try to

uncover Draco Malfoy's secret. As the novel progresses, however, the reader comes to

realize that, with the character of Draco, Rowling has abandoned conventional

characterization of the rival in favor of a more accurate and believable appraisal of

character. In this novel, Harry and the reader become more attuned to the realities of

Draco's life as Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy's son.   Though Harry does not discover it until

December of his sixth year, at the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince* the reader is made aware

that Lord Voldemort has assigned Draco a dangerous mission in punishment for his father's

mismanagement of the operation to steal the prophesy at the end of Harry and Draco's fifth

year. Narcissa Malfoy is terrified for the life of her son, believing that Lord Voldemort

intends for Draco to be killed in his attempt. Thus, when the reader and Harry witness

Draco's bravado on the Hogwarts Express, the reader and Harry are, for one of the first

times in the series, operating under what we could call different levels of knowing. This

difference permits an ironic distance between protagonist and reader and thus we begin to

worry about Draco at the same time that we feel frustrated with Harry for what we now view

as his stubborn desire to get Draco into trouble (which was, ironically, how we felt about

Draco's exhaustive efforts to get Harry into trouble the previous year). Rowling permits

Harry to acquire the same knowledge as her reader as the year progresses: first, when Harry

overhears Snape and Draco arguing about the Unbreakable Vow, then when Harry is told by

Moaning Myrtle of the boy who comes to her bathroom to cry, and finally when Harry himself witnesses Draco's private sobs of despair and overhears him admit his fear that Voldemort will kill him and all of his family if he fails. This full fleshing out of Draco's circumstances within his community allows Harry to follow the reader's steps and construct a more sympathetic view of his rival. Additionally, this new perspective influences and ultimately alters Harry's behavior and feelings toward Draco. Though Harry continues to try to discover Draco's plans in an effort to safeguard others, his hatred for his rival is gradually replaced with sympathy. Though he can never like Draco or condone his choices, he comes to a greater awareness of Draco's nature. When Draco disarms Dumbledore and declares that he intends to kill the Headmaster, Harry is able to understand and sympathize with the internal struggle that Draco undergoes as he points his wand at Dumbledore. Harry recognizes Draco's desperation and, when Draco agonizes aloud that if he doesn't kill Dumbledore, Voldemort will kill his whole family, Harry is able to identify with Draco's desire to protect those he loves. As Harry witnesses the scene, he believes that Draco's impulses are not truly malevolent and thus Harry's focus is on Draco's wand, knowing that whatever Draco does with it will reveal the result of his year-long internal struggle. Therefore, when Draco lowers his weapon, Harry believes this action to be revelatory of Draco's moral agency and of his inherent identity: like Dumbledore, Harry realizes that Draco is not a killer. Thus, after Dumbledore's death, when the rest of the Order of the Phoenix are ready to vilify Draco, Harry is able to say with confidence that Draco would never have killed Dumbledore.

Similarly, as I will further explain in the next chapter, Harry's perception of Severus Snape, the antagonistic professor, is drastically altered from what it was at the start of the

narrative to what it is at the end. And even Dumbledore, who, as Harry's omniscient and omnipotent mentor, is perhaps one of the most archetypal characters in the series, is shown to be a more deeply layered character than we, or Harry, ever anticipated. When Harry learns of Dumbledore's childhood and his relationship with Grindelwald, he is shocked to find out that Dumbledore once expressed and pursued political ideologies that do not greatly differ with the current political philosophy of Lord Voldemort. He is alarmed that the figure whom he loved and admired could have behaved in the selfish and arrogant manner that cost Dumbledore the life of his sister and his relationship with his brother. However, by coming to understand Dumbledore's identity in the past in relation to his actions in the present, Harry is able to more accurately evaluate Dumbledore's character, knowledge that aids Harry in his own journey to becoming a moral agent.

Thus, by complicating and deviating from the familiar story patterns of the children's literature tradition and focusing on the creation of believable and complex characters, Rowling rejects the idea that a novel for children must be action-oriented rather than character-oriented. The structure of the narrative, the way it underwrites character revelation exposes the sophistication and complexity that traditionally has belonged to the adult literature category. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will discuss in more detail the way Rowling portrays Harry's intellectual, moral, and emotional progress throughout the series in order to illuminate the fluidity of the children's literature and adult literature categories.

Chapter Seven
"Till This Moment, I Never Knew Myself"

In this chapter, I argue that by placing Rowling's narrative alongside works like Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, we are able to see how Rowling also anchors her narrative in the adult literature tradition. Through the flexibility, ingenuity, and dexterity that she demonstrates in creating a complex and ever-developing identity for her protagonist, Rowling is able to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood by showing us the world through one solitary yet ever-evolving perspective and by advocating for "psychological realism" in her text for children.

These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game…[491]

What do we mean – it is a common term of praise – when we say that a book is "original"? Not, usually, that the writer has invented something without precedent, but that she has made us "perceive" what we already, in a conceptual sense, "know", by deviating from the conventional, habitual ways of representing reality. Defamiliarization, in short, is another word for "originality".[492]

'Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?'[493]

In a 2007 *Reader's Digest* interview, Tim Boquet describes Rowling's unique brand of magic that makes her books so appealing to mature audiences and induces Rowling to reveal her influences:

> So what has Rowling got that other writers haven't? "Potions, intrigue, magic and 'what happens next'," says [Annie] Williams (deputy head of Christ Church Primary School in Camden, England). "The same formula Shakespeare used." Rowling may write about wizards, ghosts, elves and the hippogriff, which is half-horse, half-eagle, but her books are driven with all the suspense and twists of detective novels. Perhaps that's why Harry is also hugely popular with adults. Stories of parents muscling in to read

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[491] Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 326.

[492] David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 55.

[493] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 579.

each new volume ahead of their children are common. "I love a good whodunnit and my passion is plot construction. Readers love to be tricked, but not conned," Rowling says, warming to her theme. "The best twist ever in literature is in Jane Austen's *Emma*. To me she is the target of perfection at which we shoot in vain."[494]

In this interview, Boquet credits Rowling's success to her ability to create the "suspense and twists" of detective novels. And, indeed, Rowling's ability to keep her readers in suspense over the course of seven books is a feat in and of itself. By comparing Rowling's novels to detective novels, however, Boquet underestimates (albeit perhaps unconsciously) Rowling's literary achievement by likening her series to genre fiction. Citing *Ulysses* in which Joyce superimposed the banal events of a day in Dublin upon the heroic story of Odysseus's journey back from the Trojan War in order to imply that reality is less exciting than any traditional text would have us believe, David Lodge explains in *The Art of Fiction* that "because suspense is particularly associated with popular forms of fiction, it has often been despised, or at least demoted, by literary novelists of the modern period."[495] Boquet's comments similarly imply that Rowling's work is popular, but not realistic. However, Lodge continues, "But there have been writers of stature, especially in the nineteenth century, who consciously borrowed the suspense-creating devices of popular fiction and turned them to their own purposes."[496] One such novelist, Lodge tells us, was Thomas Hardy; another, Rowling tells us, was Jane Austen. In this way, by citing Austen as her "target of perfection," Rowling gives us a clue as to the purpose of her own intricate plot

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[494] Boquet, Tim. "J.K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter." *Reader's Digest*. (December 2000): http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2000/1200-readersdigest-boquet.htm

[495] Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, 14.

[496] Ibid.

construction. As Wayne Booth has noted of Austen's *Emma* in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Austen works "at all points to heighten the reader's sense of dramatic irony, usually in the form of a contrast between what Emma knows and what the reader knows."[497] This, I argue, is the way that Rowling works in her series; the mystery depends on the point of view of the protagonist and through him she illuminates the fictional reality. Therefore, I believe that it is Annie Williams, not Tim Boquet, who has the measure of Rowling by comparing her methods to those of Shakespeare; Rowling's series may be suspenseful, but it does not follow that it is not expertly crafted or that it does not expose truths about the human experience. Rather, the genius of Rowling lies in the way that she "tricks" her readers into believing that they are reading genre fiction, while in truth they are reading a serious work of realism.

In Chapter Five, I demonstrated the way in which Rowling's narrative strategy emerges throughout the series, and, in conjunction with this, the way in which her method of characterization changes as the narrative progress, moving the reader from the expected to the unexpected and from familiarity to intimacy. But it is with her protagonist, Harry, that we witness the greatest deviation of a character from his prescribed role as the hero of a children's novel. In this way, Rowling's novels call into question the boundary between children's literature and literature for adults. Because her novels detail the life of one character over the course of his seven-year education, Rowling is able to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood by showing us the world through one solitary yet ever-evolving perspective. In this way, we see that the *Harry Potter* series rejects Perry Nodelman's claims that one of the key defining markers of a children's novel is that it is

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[497] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 255.

primarily action-oriented rather than character-oriented. Additionally, Nodelman's notion

that children's literature must be presented from the point of view of innocence is also called

into question by Harry's increasing maturity as the series progresses. His experiences with

death, corruption, betrayal, and injustice precipitate an early loss of innocence and,

consequently, shift the point of view to one of experience. As a result, by encouraging her

readers to sympathize with Harry and to reflect upon his intellectual and emotional maturity

as the series progresses Rowling also brings awareness to the fluidity of the categories of

childhood, adolescence, and adulthood and—most importantly for the purposes of this

dissertation—their literatures. Harry's development is not one simple arc, but consists of

failures and setbacks not only in his journey as a hero and as a student, but also in the

growth of his moral self. Throughout the series, we witness, at times, Harry falling short of

our expectations of him; at other time, he greatly exceeds what we think he is capable of

physically or emotionally.[498]

In the following pages, I will demonstrate that because she devotes an entire novel to

recording the events that occur within one year of Harry's life in the magical world,

Rowling is able to differentiate the narrative style of each installment according to Harry's

age and maturity and, thus, she shows us the moral and intellectual growth of her character.

Rowling therefore demonstrates to her readers that Harry's development is dependent upon

and the result of a sequence of individual experiences and his reflection upon them. His

moral and intellectual growth occur as consequences of internal struggle; they are not simply

sudden transitions precipitated by symbolic events as they would be in a traditional heroic

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[498] Indeed, in *Order of the Phoenix* Dumbledore tells Harry that this is how his own perspective of
Harry operates.

fantasy novel, but rather the result of a gradual acquisition of knowledge, experience, and power. Through this approach, the reader is also able to witness the change in degree to which the characters, especially Rowling's protagonist, are aware of the prevailing conflicts in the series and how they modify their thoughts and reactions to these issues over time. Therefore, it could be argued that Rowling thus adheres to Virginia Woolf's method of establishing intimacy between reader and character, which, in turn, permits a shift in focus onto "more serious matters"—namely, in this series, the development of moral agency and social responsibility.

Before I begin, I would like to emphasize that Rowling is the first writer of children's literature to attempt to portray the moral development of one character on such an epic scale. While it is true that there have been numerous children's books about the moral education or spiritual development of a character, especially during the Golden Age of children's literature—for instance, in addition to *Tom Brown*, we have seen this in *The Water-Babies* and *The Secret Garden*—never before has a writer for children made the study of one child's evolving morality through time the central concern of a narrative that spans seven books (and more than seven years). What is more, never has a writer for children modulated her narrative in such a way as to allow each book to demonstrate this development through the subtle changes that appear in its structure, style, characterization, and themes.

This kind of intimate study of one character's development through which we, his readers, are permitted to witness and reflect upon the process of the protagonist's education is *not*, however, new to adult literature. Rather, the idea of orienting the reader in a narrative through one character's perspective in order to encourage us to imaginatively align

ourselves, sympathize, and grow with that character is, instead, very familiar. Placing the individual at the center of a narrative and permitting the reader to come to know the fictional person and the fictional world through the character's interior life, consciousness, feelings, hopes, and dreams through this kind of non-reciprocal intimacy is one of the adult novel's primary achievements.[499] Therefore, in the same way that we can place *Harry Potter* alongside the myth of Hercules, Arthurian legend, the school story, heroic fantasy, or other literature for children (like, for example, *Peter and Wendy* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*)— and, in so doing, witness the way that Rowling adopts and adapts these familiar stories in order to tap into our cultural memory—so too can we place Harry alongside the great adult narratives of Western literature like Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*,[500] Jane Austen's *Emma*, or Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and find evidence of the stylistic sophistication, thematic boldness, psychological complexity, and authentic semblance to reality that render a text a classic work of literature. In this way, Rowling allies herself not only with children's literature, but also with adult literature and, in so doing, effaces the boundary that has long existed between the two categories.

Austen, Rowling, and Literary Realism

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[499] I am here indebted to Professor Philip Fisher and his introductory lecture on *The Classic Phase of the Novel* for this insight into the novelistic genre.

[500] For example, we can trace a relationship between Rowling's novels and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* in the way each novel in the series demonstrates a different stage in Harry's moral growth. As he progresses from book to book and year to year, he learns different lessons that make him a moral agent.

It is particularly her novels' similarity to those of Jane Austen that demonstrates Rowling's commitment to creating a believable reality through the 'realness' of her characters, especially her protagonist. In turn, through Harry, Rowling introduces her readers to what Virginia Woolf calls "the subject(s) of human experience" and illuminates the themes that I argue are at the core of her novel: empathy and social responsibility. In this manner, she fulfills Woolf's requirements to be a "great novel." In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf writes:

> If, that is, you think of the novels which seem to you great novels—War and Peace, Vanity Fair, Tristram Shandy, Madame Bovary, Pride and Prejudice, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Villette—if you think of these books, you do at once think of some character who seemed to you so real (I do not by that mean so lifelike) that it has the power to make you think not merely of it itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes—of religion, of love, of war, of peace, of family life, of balls in country towns, of sunsets, moonrises, the immortality of the soul. There is hardly any subject of human experience that is left out of War and Peace it seems to me. And in all these novels all these great novelists have brought us to see whatever they wish us to see through some character. Otherwise, they would not be novelists; but poets, historians, or pamphleteers.[501]

Therefore, I will now turn to *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* and compare them to Rowling's seven-part narrative in order to demonstrate the way that Rowling's realistic representation of Harry's life promotes an understanding of the means to achieve moral agency.

David Lodge tells us that "the choice of the points of view from which the story is told is arguably the most important single decision that the novelist has to make, for it

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[501] Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*," 11.

fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions."[502] Like Austen, Rowling selects a third person limited omniscient point of view for her narrative and thus the story is almost always implicitly told from Harry's perspective.[503] As with Austen's Emma Woodhouse or Elizabeth Bennet, throughout the entirety of Rowling's series the reader has access to Harry's thoughts and emotions and, though at times we achieve an ironic distance from the protagonist, for the most part we remain within his scope of knowledge. For example, in Chapter One of *Philosopher's Stone*, because Harry is an infant and does not have the meta-cognitive awareness to be responsible for the narration of the events that must be described in the first chapter, the locus of narration shifts in order to accommodate the telling of the story, first to Vernon Dursley, then Minerva McGonagall, and then only briefly to Harry.[504] But even in this single paragraph when the story is told from Harry's perspective the narration focuses on the infant Harry's lack of awareness:

> Harry Potter rolled over inside his blankets without waking up. One small hand closed on the letter beside him and he slept on, not knowing he was special, not knowing he was famous, not knowing he would be woken in a few hours' time by Mrs. Dursley's scream as she opened the front door to put out the milk bottles, nor that he would spend the next few weeks being prodded and pinched by his cousin Dudley…. He couldn't know that at this very moment, people meeting in secret all over the country were holding up their

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[502] Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, 26.

[503] Exceptions are the first two chapters of *Half-Blood Prince*, the first chapter of *Deathly Hallows,* and the chapter that recounts the events at the first quidditch match in *Philosopher's Stone* when the viewpoint switches to Hermione and Ron.

[504] What is interesting is that she also does this in the chapter where Quirrell tries to kill him during the Quidditch match. She tells part of the chapter from Hermione's point of view, again, trying to accommodate the telling of the story, as Harry is unaware of what might be happening in the stands, yet this is crucial to the plot.

glasses and saying in hushed voices: "To Harry Potter – the boy who lived!"[505]

As we see Hartfield, its inhabitants, and its goings-on only through the eyes of Emma Woodhouse, by limiting our perspective of the wizarding world and its community to Harry's point of view, we consequently experience the world at the same time that Harry does. In this way, some of the criticisms that surface regarding the simplicity or jejuneness of the earlier books can be repudiated. For example, as a pre-adolescent boy, Harry's thoughts are mostly banal and reflect the concerns of his immediate surroundings. In Chapter Two of *Philosopher's Stone*, though Harry's more appreciative ten-year-old perspective contrasts with his lack of awareness as an infant, the reader's insight into Harry's life is still limited by the degree of his intellectual and emotional maturity as well as by his vocabulary:

> Harry was frying eggs by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen with his mother. Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large, pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes and thick, blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel – Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig.[506]

Here, Harry's description of Dudley consists of hackneyed and repetitive adjectives (large, pink face; small, watery blue eyes; thick, blond hair; thick, fat head) as well as a juvenile sense of humor (pig in a wig). As the chapter continues, his observations, concerns, and inner dialogue at the zoo also reflect those of a pre-adolescent:

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[505] Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 17.

[506] Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 21.

'I had a dream about a motorbike,' said Harry, remembering suddenly. 'It was flying.'

Uncle Vernon nearly crashed into the car in front. He turned right around in his seat and yelled at Harry, his face like a gigantic beetroot with a moustache, 'MOTORBIKES DON'T FLY!'

Dudley and Piers sniggered.

'I know they don't,' said Harry. 'It was only a dream.'

But he wished he hadn't said anything. If there was one thing the Dursleys hated even more than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything acting in a way that it shouldn't, no matter if it was in a dream or even a cartoon – they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas.

It was a very sunny Saturday and the zoo was crowded with families. The Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice-creams at the entrance and then, because the smiling lady in the van had asked Harry what he wanted before they could hurry him away, they bought him a cheap lemon ice lolly. It wasn't bad, either, Harry thought, licking it as they watched a gorilla scratching its head and looking remarkably like Dudley, except that it wasn't blond.

Harry had the best morning he'd had in a long time. He was careful to walk a little way apart from the Dursleys so that Dudley and Piers, who were starting to get bored with the animals by lunch-time, wouldn't fall back into their favorite hobby of hitting him. They ate in the zoo restaurant and when Dudley had a tantrum because his knickerbocker glory wasn't big enough, Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Harry was allowed to finish the first.

Harry felt, afterwards, that he should have known that it was all too good to last.[507]

By telling us the story through a third person limited omniscient point of view, Rowling ties our experience of the fictional world to an individual mind which is constrained by the limits of a ten-year-old's knowledge, concerns, and descriptive abilities. Harry dreams of escape on a motorbike and, lacking his own parents, views the zoo as "crowded with families." He compares his uncle's face to a beetroot and his overgrown, unintelligent cousin Dudley to a

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[507] Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 24-25.

gorilla. His emotions and concerns are immediate: he is excited about having two ice-

creams and vigilantly maintains a safe distance from the other two bullying boys. Despite

his caution and his ten years of experience with the Dursleys, as well as his knowledge that,

increasingly often, odd things have happened around him, Harry is unable to predict that

something would disturb the restive peace of the afternoon. Thus, his experience with the

boa constrictor comes as a surprise to him at this age:

> After lunch they went to the reptile house. It was cool and dark in here, with lit windows all along the walls. Behind the glass, all sorts of lizards and snakes were crawling over bits of wood and stone. Dudley and Piers wanted to see huge, poisonous cobras and thick, man-crushing pythons. Dudley quickly found the largest snake in the place. It could have wrapped its body twice around Uncle Vernon's car and crushed it into a dustbin – but at the moment it didn't look in the mood. In fact, it was fast asleep.
>
> Dudley stood with his nose pressed against the glass, staring at the glistening brown coils.
>
> 'Make it move,' he whined at his father. Uncle Vernon tapped on the glass, but the snake didn't budge.
>
> 'Do it again,' Dudley ordered. Uncle Vernon rapped on the glass smartly with his knuckles, but the snake just snoozed on.
>
> 'This is boring,' Dudley moaned. He shuffled away.
>
> Harry moved in front of the tank and looked intently at the snake. He wouldn't have been surprised if it had died of boredom itself – no company except stupid people drumming their fingers on the glass trying to disturb it all day long. It was worse than having a cupboard as a bedroom, where the only visitor was Aunt Petunia hammering on the door to wake you up – at least he got to visit the rest of the house.
>
> The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.
>
> *It winked.*
>
> Harry stared. Then he looked quickly around to see if anyone was watching. They weren't. He looked back at the snake and winked, too.[508]

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[508] Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 25.

Here again, our information about the incident is processed through Harry's thoughts about it. His description of the reptile house (cool and dark) and his hypotheses about the snake's size and power (twice as big as Uncle Vernon's car and able to crush it into a dustbin) are accurate, but unimaginative, as if he has taken Uncle Vernon's advice in the car and limited his thoughts to stolidly real things. Even when he witnesses something out of the ordinary, he makes certain that no one is watching before he responds. However, as the novels progress and Harry, in turn, advances in maturity and in his knowledge of himself, he comprehends more and, consequently, he is better able to express what he observes to the reader.

In *Deathly Hallows*, for example, we view through Harry's eyes another outing (this time, with Hermione) and another encounter with a giant snake (Voldemort's Nagini); by comparing it with the above zoo experience we are able to see the difference between Harry's ten-year-old and seventeen-year-old self. In this scene, Harry and Hermione travel to Godric's Hollow[509] on Christmas Eve in order to discover whether or not Dumbledore may have left the sword of Godric Gryffindor[510] or any other information that would help them destroy the Horcruxes with Bathilda Bagshot.[511] Hermione is wary about traveling to Godric's Hollow because she believes Lord Voldemort could have someone watching the

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[509] Godric's Hollow was the home of Harry's parents and it was the place where they were murdered by Lord Voldemort on October 31, 1981.

[510] The sword of Godric Gryffindor was impregnated with Basilisk venom in *Chamber of Secrets* when Harry defeated yet another snake in the bowels of Hogwarts. Harry, Ron, and Hermione only realize that this means the sword can be used to destroy Horcruxes at the beginning of *Deathly Hallows* and thus are trying to find it in order to destroy the locket Horcrux.

[511] Bathilda Bagshot was a notable magical historian (for instance, she wrote *Hogwarts, A History*, a book that is mentioned in every installment of the series) who befriended both the Dumbledore and Potter families when they moved to Godric's Hollow.

area in order to capture and kill Harry. Therefore, the two use Polyjuice Potion in order to

alter their appearances while also wearing the Invisibility Cloak as they visit the graves of

Harry's parents and see the memorial that wizards erected to commemorate their deaths:

> 'They shouldn't have written on the sign!' said Hermione, indignant.
> But Harry beamed at her.
> 'It's brilliant. I'm glad they did. I …'
> He broke off. A heavily muffled figure was hobbling up the lane towards them, silhouetted by the bright lights in the distant square. Harry thought, though it was hard to judge, that the figure was a woman. She was moving slowly, possibly frightened of slipping on the snowy ground. Her stoop, her stoutness, her shuffling gait all gave an impression of extreme age. They watched in silence as she drew nearer. Harry was waiting to see whether she would turn into any of the cottages she was passing, but he knew, instinctively, that she would not. At last she came to a halt a few yards from them, and simply stood there in the middle of the frozen road, facing them.
> He did not need Hermione to pinch his arm. There was next to no chance that this woman was a Muggle: she was standing there gazing at a house that ought to have been completely invisible to her, if she was not a witch. Even assuming that she *was* a witch, however, it was odd behaviour to come out on a night this cold, simply to look at an old ruin. By all the rules of normal magic, meanwhile, she ought not to be able to see Hermione and him at all. Nevertheless, Harry had the strangest feeling that she knew that they were there, and also who they were. Just as he had reached this uneasy conclusion, she raised a gloved hand and beckoned.
> […]
> Was it possible that she had been waiting for them all these long months? That Dumbledore had told her to wait, and that Harry would come in the end? Was it not likely that it was she who had moved in the shadows in the graveyard and had followed them to this spot? Even her ability to sense them suggested some Dumbledore-ish power that he had never encountered before.
> […]
> She smelled bad, or perhaps it was her house: Harry wrinkled his nose as they sidled past her and pulled off the Cloak. Now that he was beside her, he realized how tiny she was; bowed down with age, she came barely level with his chest. She closed the door behind them, her knuckles blue and mottled against the peeling

paint, then turned and peered into Harry's face. Her eyes were thick with cataracts and sunken into folds of transparent skin, and her whole face was dotted with broken veins and liver spots. He wondered whether she could make him out at all; even if she could, it was the balding Muggle whose identity he had stolen that she would see.

The odour of old age, of dust, of unwashed clothes and stale food intensified as she unwound a moth-eaten black shawl, revealing a head of scant white hair through which the scalp showed clearly.

[…]

Bathilda was tottering around the place lighting candles, but it was still very dark, not to mention extremely dirty. Thick dust crunched beneath their feet, and Harry's nose detected, underneath the dank and mildewed smell, something worse, like meat gone bad. He wondered when was the last time anyone had been inside Bathilda's house to check whether she was coping. She seemed to have forgotten that she could do magic, too, for she lit the candles clumsily by hand, her trailing lace cuff in constant danger of catching fire.

'Let me do that,' offered Harry, and he took the matches from her. She stood watching him as he finished lighting the candle stubs that stood on saucers around the room, perched precariously on stacks of books and on side tables crammed with cracked and mouldy cups.

[…]

And in the instant that he looked away, his eyes raking the tangled mess for a sword hilt, a ruby, she moved weirdly: He saw it out of the corner of his eye; panic made him turn and horror paralyzed him as he saw the old body collapsing and the great snake pouring from the place where her neck had been.

The snake struck as he raised his wand: The force of the bite to his forearm sent the wand spinning up toward the ceiling; its light swung dizzyingly around the room and was extinguished: Then a powerful blow from the tail to his midriff knocked the breath out of him: He fell backward onto the dressing table, into the mound of filthy clothing — He rolled sideways, narrowly avoiding the snake's tail, which thrashed down upon the table where he had been a second earlier: Fragments of the glass surface rained upon him as he hit the floor. From below he heard Hermione call, "Harry?"

He could not get enough breath into his lungs to call back: Then a heavy smooth mass smashed him to the floor and he felt it slide over him, powerful, muscular —

'No!' he gasped, pinned to the floor.

'*Yes*,' whispered the voice. '*Yesss . . . hold you . . . hold you . . .*'

'*Accio . . . Accio Wand . . .*'

But nothing happened and he needed his hands to try to force the snake from him as it coiled itself around his torso, squeezing the air from him, pressing the Horcrux hard into his chest, a circle of ice that throbbed with life, inches from his own frantic heart, and his brain was flooding with cold, white light, all thought obliterated, his own breath drowned, distant footsteps, everything going. . . [512]

Seven years and seven books later, the reader is still limited by the constraints of private vision, but this vision is no longer hampered by Harry's immaturity or inability to express what he observes or detects in a vivid and perspicacious manner. The first episode at the zoo, though it spans an entire day, takes up only a few paragraphs; in this book, a few minutes are described in more than six pages. Interestingly, in this way, Rowling also adopts Austen's method of setting her readers in duration, in unfolding real time. For example, Harry's encounter with the snake is told with meticulous detail, but also with a palpable pace. Where Harry had once imagined the snake's size and envisioned what it would be like for it to crush something in the span of a second's thought, seven years later the reader is made aware of the snake's strength through the destruction and injury we witness as it is happening in fictional reality to Harry.

The suspense and doubt Harry felt at the beginning of the scene are joined with feelings of inevitability and probability when, as Hermione predicted, the snake-as-Bathilda turns out to a trap laid by Lord Voldemort. Thus, though Godric's Hollow at first seems worlds away from Austen's England, in both *Deathly Hallows* and *Pride and Prejudice*,

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[512] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 272-275.

what Philip Fisher calls the "patient development of inevitable consequence"[513] alternates

with surprise. For example, in the episode in *Pride and Prejudice* where Mr. Collins visits

the Bennets, Austen balances the unexpected with the inevitable. The episode begins with a

letter from Mr. Collins that hints that he would like to marry one of the young ladies,

thereby setting up an expectation and a direction for the suspense of the overall episode.

Mr. Collins arrives at the Longbourn estate, he makes several blunders, and then proposes to

Elizabeth, which is the climax of the episode. The twist in the expected action comes when

Elizabeth turns down Mr. Collins and he immediately proposes to Charlotte Lucas. In

Rowling's episode, Harry arrives at Godric's Hollow expecting to find something at

Bathilda Bagshot's home that will help him in his efforts to destroy Lord Voldemort. He

and Hermione travel to Bathilda's home, Harry discovers the photograph of the young thief

(Grindelwald) that has been plaguing his and Voldemort's dreams, and then he discovers

that Bathilda is really the snake Nagini in disguise, which is the climax of the episode. The

twist in the expected action comes when Harry drops the photograph of Grindelwald as he

and Hermione escape through the window, only for it to be picked up by Lord Voldemort

who finally recognizes the identity of the young thief, information that Harry knows

Voldemort has been desperately seeking since the first pages of the novel. In both Austen's

and Rowling's novels, the episode (and, indeed, each episode) clarifies the overall action. In

Pride and Prejudice, Mr. Collins's visit and subsequent proposal to Charlotte Lucas brings

Elizabeth to Hunsford where she will receive her first proposal from Mr. Darcy. In *Deathly*

Hallows, Harry's visit to Bathilda Bagshot's home and the subsequent revelation of the

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[513] I am indebted to Philip Fisher's course "The Classic Phase of the Novel" for this idea of plot as
the most rational element of fiction and its characteristics.

"merry thief's" identity acquaints Harry with Lord Voldemort's desire to become master of the Elder Wand (the first Hallow). Therefore, in both novelists' work, each event seems to either advance or retard the action, but in the end, every event is seen to have advanced it.[514]

Additionally, in the Godric's Hollow episode in *Deathly Hallows*, unlike the episode at the zoo, Harry's mature eye takes in the detail of each location and each person. He no longer makes assumptions or jumps to conclusions as he had in previous books (for instance, in *Philosopher's Stone* when he assumes Snape's mangled knee betrays his identity as the would-be thief of the stone). Instead, when he first sees the "figure" in the lane, he finds it "hard to judge" the person's gender; he emphasizes that though he *thinks* it is a woman, he remains uncertain. As she comes toward him, he absorbs her hesitant movements and hobbling walk in order to come to the conclusion that she must be aged. Here, Harry makes no snap judgments, but instead there is an ever-increasing appraisal of his situation that leads him to believe that the figure is Bathilda Bagshot. Indeed, each description involves an effort to make his perceptions more precise. Bathilda's "extreme" age is determined by Harry's thoughts of "her stoop, her stoutness, her shuffling gait." Harry does not simply tell us that she and/or her house smell "bad," instead he makes an effort to distinguish the anatomy of the smell by telling us that the mingled odors of old age, dust, unwashed clothes, and stale food intensified, and underneath all of that was the unsettling aroma of spoiled

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[514] Interestingly, if we look at Rowling's series as a whole, we can see that the same can be said of each book. The seven books have a palpable pace and every event is seen to advance the overall plot of Harry's defeat of Lord Voldemort. For example, this is why, when Harry's blood is taken from him in *Goblet of Fire*, Dumbledore has a gleam of triumph in his eye because, as he tells Harry in *Deathly Hallows*, that is when Dumbledore suspected that Voldemort would bind Harry to him and, therefore, to life so that Harry might survive even if Voldemort killed him. The moment seems inconsequential to the overall action of the narrative at the time, but is revealed to be absolutely crucial at the climax of the series.

meat. Bathilda's hands are likewise graphically described; they not only have blue knuckles, but are also "mottled." Her eyes are "thick with cataracts" but also "sunken into folds of transparent skin." Her face is "dotted" with broken veins and liver spots and Harry tells us her hair is "scant," but gives us a more accurate appraisal of the amount of hair on her head by telling us that the scalp "showed clearly" through it.

This is the iterative narrative style of realism and it recalls not only Austen's method of conveying the realness of her fictional world, but also other writers for adults who describe to us those parts of physical existence of which we seldom speak. For example, Chapter Nine of Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead*, in which he describes his experience in the prison bathhouse in Siberia, can be likened to this scene in that Harry's description of Bathilda is similarly democratic and sympathetic. Dostoevsky describes the "shaven heads and crimson steaming bodies" of the convicts and recalls that "the steaming backs of the convicts show distinctly the scars or blows of the lashes they have received in the past, so that all those backs looked now as though freshly wounded."[515] He relates to us his fear and revulsion at the convicts' "hideous" bodies, but his perspective is sympathetic rather than judgmental.[516] It is in a similar way that Harry describes the unpleasant realities of an aged person without euphemism, but not without sympathy; as he watches her, he offers to help Bathilda with the candles and concernedly wonders about her care.

But what further connects Rowling's style to the sophisticated "real" world portrait that Austen gives us in her novels is how, by aligning our perspective with that of her protagonist, we witness and reflect upon the process of Harry's education and ultimately

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[515] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The House of the Dead* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), 125.

[516] Ibid.

gain sympathy for him as he gains sympathy for others. In *Philosopher's Stone*, Harry first earns our compassion and our regard because of his situation and the way he responds to it. Forced to live in a cupboard under the stairs, to bear up under the mistreatment of his domineering and neglectful guardians, to have to endure the physical and emotional bullying of his cousin every day of his life, the moment of identification with the caged and persecuted boa constrictor at once shows us the sadness of Harry situation, but also the way Harry nevertheless retains his self-respect and his sense of humor. By giving us a window into Harry's thoughts, we see that a trip to the zoo where he is rebuked for daring to relate a dream, is given a cheap treat, is "allowed" to finish the remains of his cousin's meal, and has to be wary of being abused by two older boys, is for Harry "too good" to be true. As a result, we become aware of the misery that must be his everyday life without Harry ever asking for or even thinking he deserves our readerly pity.   It is in a similar manner that we learn about the pitiable life of Miss Bates in *Emma*. Because Miss Bates speaks whatever is on her mind without filtering her thoughts, Emma and the reader gain an accurate insight into her reality. For example, in Chapter Twenty-Seven, when Miss Bates describes her gratitude to Mr. Knightley for giving her family his apples, her cheerfulness and her effusions of thanks endear her to us because she simultaneously and entirely without design reveals how close their situation is to actual poverty: "for really as to ours being gone, I could not absolutely say that we had a great many left—it was but a half a dozen indeed; but they should all be kept for Jane…"[517] Similarly, because Miss Bates also mentions that Jane Fairfax did not wish for Mr. Knightley to know that their stock of apples was so low, Austen likewise induces a feeling of respect and sympathy in her readers for Jane, who knows that

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[517] Austen, *Emma*, 222.

her aunts words unintentionally invite the pity of their friends and who recognizes, and is embarrassed by, the impropriety of Miss Bates's admission.

Sympathy Through Control of Inside Views

It is our unremitting proximity to Harry's character, however, that firmly establishes our sympathetic bond with him. As Jane Austen maintained the reader's sympathy by using the protagonist herself as a kind of narrator in *Emma*, so too does Rowling make us see the world through Harry's eyes. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth tells us that sympathy is established through the control of inside views:

> By showing most of the story through Emma's eyes, the author insures that we shall travel with Emma rather than stand against her. It is not simply that Emma provides, in the unimpeachable evidence of her own conscience, proof that she has many redeeming qualities that do not appear on the surface; such evidence could be given with authorial commentary, though perhaps not with such force and conviction. Much more important, the sustained inside view leads the reader to hope for good fortune for the character with whom he travels, quite independently of the qualities revealed.[518]

In the beginning of the series, it is easy for the reader to sympathize with Harry because his actions and thoughts demonstrate genuine compassion and humility. At the zoo, Harry's empathy for the boa constrictor and his desire-made-manifest to help set it free is the first of many episodes in which the reader sees Harry's depth of feeling for others and his commitment to helping them. In the second volume, Harry's generosity of feeling is revealed when we witness his enduring pity for the house-elf Dobby despite the negative

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[518] Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 245-246.

consequences often unintentionally caused by the elf's behavior. We are moved when Harry

sets Dobby free from the abusive Malfoys because we see into Harry's mind and know that

Harry's goodness is not calculated, but springs from sincere generosity and a wish to

alleviate another's pain. We are convinced, as Booth puts it, "that his heart, like ours, is in

the right place."[519]

As the series progresses, however, it is because we have a sustained inside view of

his thoughts and feelings that Harry *retains* our sympathy. As "odd things" continue to

happen around Harry and as he comes to be thought of as a hero by many (and even at

times, though he is embarrassed to admit it, by himself[520]), if we did not have a sustained

inside view of Harry's thoughts and emotions, we might at times think he was callous or

pompous. Indeed, from another perspective, Harry can seem "mediocre, arrogant as his

father, a determined rule-breaker, delighted to find himself famous, attention-seeking and

impertinent," as, in fact, he seems to Severus Snape.[521]   When, for example, in *Prisoner of

Azkaban* Harry disobeys Professor McGonagall and makes an excursion to Hogsmeade

despite the lengths that the Ministry and Hogwarts adults have gone to in order to keep him

safe from Sirius Black, the risk he takes seems selfish and arrogant, as if he were above the

rules and did not care that so many people were concerned for his well-being. However, as

in *Emma* when we see Emma's callous behavior towards Miss Bates, but then immediately

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[519] Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 246.

[520] For instance, in *Order of the Phoenix* when he expects to be treated differently than the other children because of what he had accomplished in the previous four installments.

[521] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 545.

witness her sincere remorse and self-castigation, we also vividly experience Harry's self-reproach. When Lupin chastises him for leaving the castle, Harry is ashamed:

> 'Don't expect me to cover up for you again, Harry. I cannot make you take Sirius Black seriously. But I would have thought that what you have heard when the Dementors draw near you would have had more of an effect on you. Your parents gave their lives to keep you alive, Harry. A poor way to repay them – gambling their sacrifice for a bag of magic tricks.'
> He walked away, leaving Harry feeling worse by far than he had at any point in Snape's office.[522]

In this scene, Harry feels the irresponsibility and egotism of his actions and responds with shame; he does not venture into Hogsmeade again and even decides not to retrieve his invisibility cloak in the hidden passageway, preventing him from any other illegal excursions. Similarly, though Harry might seem presumptuous and desiring of attention when his name appears in the Goblet of Fire, because his inner dialogue provides evidence of his innocence and, more importantly, of his embarrassment, we are able to wish for his success in the Tournament.

Perhaps the most important way that we become connected to Harry and thus hope for his success is that, because of our sustained inside view, we tend to err with him and share in his self-reproach. Our emotional reaction, as Booth explains, tends to be like his and we feel analogous emotions like shame and regret when he feels them.[523] For example, when Harry trusts Tom Riddle in *Chamber of Secrets* only to find out that he is Lord Voldemort and that he was the one responsible for opening the chamber, we share in Harry's

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[522] Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 213.

[523] Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 248.

surprise and rue his (and our) error in judgment just as much as he. In *Order of the Phoenix*, because we are confined to Harry's perspective and we share in his feelings, when Harry sees Sirius captured by Voldemort in his dream our response, like his, is to desire Sirius's immediate rescue; we think the way Harry thinks and we react the way he reacts. Thus, when it turns out that Harry was mistaken and that his consequent impulsive actions led directly to Sirius's death, we are devastated for Harry and can excuse what Hermione calls his "saving-people thing" because, regardless of whether we questioned the validity of the dream, we approved of Harry's good intentions and are privy to the depth of his despair. In this way, no one laments Sirius's death more than Harry, except perhaps the reader.

Interestingly, with this error in judgment—which is perhaps the greatest and most regrettable mistake Harry makes in the entire seven-volume narrative—Rowling manages to firmly establish our sympathy with her protagonist for the rest of the series despite any of the initial reservations or impatience with Harry that we might have felt. What makes Rowling's novels so unique and new to her category is that while we share in Harry's point of view, we also gain critical distance from him through our knowledge of him in the past and our awareness of his present reality. In a similar way to Austen, Rowling manages to balance our inside view of Harry's worth with our objective view of his faults.[524] For example, though we might endorse Harry's desire to save Sirius, we are also concerned by his impetuousness and his blind faith that his assumptions are correct. We have seen him make the same kind of mistake in the previous novels and we have witnessed the way he sometimes willfully deceives himself out of a lack of self-awareness. Therefore, we worry that when he determines to go to the Ministry to save Sirius he might be walking into a trap

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[524] Ibid., 256.

as, for example, he did in *Goblet of Fire*. Similarly, his negligence when it comes to

practicing Occlumency in this novel inspires in us the same uneasiness as Harry's

procrastination on deciphering the golden egg clue in *Goblet of Fire*; because of this earlier

situation, we anticipate and worry that Harry might be unprepared for what follows his trip

to the Ministry.

In this book (and, indeed, throughout the entire series), it is Hermione who acts, as

Booth puts it, as the "chief corrective" to Harry's errors, as Mr. Knightley is to Emma's.

Booth writes of Knightley:

> His commentary on Emma's errors is a natural expression of his
> love; he can tell the reader and Emma at the same time precisely
> how she is mistaken. Thus, nothing Knightley says can be beside
> the point. Each affirmation of value, each accusation of error is in
> itself an action in the plot. When he rebukes Emma for
> manipulating Harriet, when he attacks her for superficiality and
> false pride, when he condemns her for gossiping and flirting with
> Frank Churchill, and finally when he attacks her for being
> "insolent" and "unfeeling" in her treatment of Miss Bates, we have
> Jane Austen's judgment on Emma, rendered dramatically. But it
> has come from someone who is essentially sympathetic toward
> Emma, so that his judgments against her are presumed to be
> temporary. His sympathy reinforces ours even as he criticizes, and
> her respect for his opinion, shown in her self-abasement after he
> has criticized, is one of our main reasons for expecting her to
> reform.[525]

Like Knightley's, Hermione's commentary on Harry is a natural expression of her love for

him.[526] Her judgments and sympathy underwrite our own, and her faith in Harry's goodness

further allies us with Harry despite the times that he might frustrate us through his

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[525] Ibid., 253.

[526] Ibid.

immaturity or pertinacity.   Nothing Hermione can say is beside the point and her judgments are Rowling's judgments, dramatically rendered. But Hermione, like Knightley, sees the good in Harry and believes in his potential to become a moral agent. Interestingly, Booth claims that by employing Knightley as a way for the reader to gain an ironic perspective of Emma as well as combining the role of commentator with the role of hero, Austen is actually more economical than even Henry James, who, in his novels, uses other characters to reflect something not seen by the protagonist (such as, for example, when he uses the Assinghams and gives us an inside view of their thoughts to tell us something not seen by the Prince or Princess in *The Golden Bowl*). Therefore, I would argue that by employing Hermione as the chief corrective to Harry's errors and also by lacking the separate, intrusive narrative voice used by both Austen and James, Rowling actually works more economically than either of these writers in the way she achieves ironic distance from, but also sympathy for, her protagonist.

The Pursuit of Moral Agency

As the series progresses, our intimacy with Harry—an intimacy that is created by Rowling's method of representing his reality through private vision—helps us gain an understanding of the way he achieves moral agency.   Harry becomes empathetic and socially responsible because he, like Austen's Elizabeth Bennet, engages in self-investigation in order to overcome his pride about his identity as the Chosen One as well as his prejudiced belief in the rightness of his perspective. Throughout the series, Harry attains an integrity of self and an awareness of his own character that, in turn, lead to a self-consciousness of his responsibility to his community. These advancements make him a

moral agent through an ever-evolving appraisal of himself, his world, and the characters that people it.

For example, as I have explained in Chapter Five, Harry comes to a better understanding of such characters as Draco Malfoy by modifying his judgments and reflecting on his growing knowledge of Draco's character. This increasingly sympathetic perception of others shapes the way he behaves toward the characters that populate his world over the course of seven years. For instance, because his experience with Severus Snape is at first confined by their relationship in the classroom, the hatred for and anger at Snape that he displays for the majority of the first four installments is absolute. There are times, however, that Snape's behavior does not align with Harry's perception of him and these moments increasingly give Harry pause as he grows in knowledge and experience. In the first novel, when Harry realizes that it is Quirrell, not Snape, who wished him dead and that Snape actually saved his life during the Quidditch match, Harry is confused because he is certain that Snape had despised him from their first sight of one another. Harry dismisses this act of (what he believes to be) uncharacteristic concern for his well-being and, in the books that follow, is still quick to believe Snape is a Dark wizard. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Snape's sneering and triumphant attitude when he discovers Sirius Black reinforces Harry's dislike, but, again, however grudgingly, Harry acknowledges that Snape acted to save him and this again confuses him. But in *Order of the Phoenix*, as Harry becomes more and more aware of the circumstances of Snape's life, he modifies his earlier judgments. He learns that Snape is a spy for Dumbledore and consequently gains respect for him, in spite of his dislike. Additionally, when Harry sees his father's cruel treatment of Snape in the Pensieve, Harry not only feels pity for Snape, but also reevaluates his assumptions about James Potter,

seeing him now from the young Severus's perspective. However, Harry's newfound empathy for Snape is tested with the death of Sirius, and, more so with the death of Dumbledore. When Snape kills Dumbledore, Harry's appraisal of Snape's behavior again shifts, believing Snape to have turned against him just as the Half-Blood Prince—who Harry had come to regard as a friend—betrayed him with the *Sectumsempra* spell. Because of Harry's expanding awareness of Snape's character throughout the series, however, Harry finds that, whatever his outward actions and speeches have conveyed, he still has sympathy for Snape. As a result of his reflection on Snape's past benevolent actions and his curiosity as to his motivations, I argue that Harry subconsciously knew that Snape's true nature might be contrary to what it appears to be in *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows*. This awareness, I believe, is evident in Harry's final scene with Snape. Harry, not fully understanding why he approaches the dying Snape, looks on him with pity and, what is more, obeys Snape's final request to take his memories. By reviewing the memories in the Pensieve, Harry comes to a complete understanding of Snape's remorse, heroism, and generosity and Harry's sympathy for him overcomes his earlier prejudiced opinions.

In this way, in Rowling's novels, the Pensieve takes the place of the letters that so often reveal to Austen's protagonists the motivations and desires of the other persons that populate their worlds. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's opinion of Mr. Darcy's nature and character undergoes a dramatic change once she receives, reviews, and reflects on Darcy's letter to her. Elizabeth realizes that she was mistaken when she assumed Darcy's behavior toward Wickham was the result of his pride, arrogance, and unfeeling disposition. Instead of wanting Darcy to be publicly disgraced as she had in the beginning of the novel when she heard of his behavior to Wickham, upon receiving another letter from

her aunt about his humble and selfless behavior in order to ensure Wickham's and Lydia's marriage, Elizabeth instead wishes to be able to spread the news of Darcy's kindness and generosity. In the scene with the Pensieve in *Deathly Hallows*, Harry witnesses Snape's deep guilt and anguish over the death of Lily Potter and he comes to understand how Snape's love for Lily led to his consequent feeling of responsibility for Harry's welfare. In this way, Harry sees how Snape is able to selflessly put aside his justified dislike of James Potter in order to fulfill his commitment to Lily's son. After he reviews these memories in Dumbledore's Pensieve, by stepping into Snape's perspective Harry, too, achieves empathy for a person against whom he was prejudiced. For this reason, Harry names his second son Albus Severus Potter, demonstrating to the world his gratitude and respect for Snape. What is more, by witnessing and coming to an understanding of Snape's deep commitment to protecting Harry and defeating Lord Voldemort, Harry comes to a realization about his own feeling of responsibility toward his community. Snape's example of sacrifice, humility, and empathy inspires in Harry a similar feeling of duty and self-abnegation, which galvanizes his resolve to protect the wizarding community and permits him to enable his own self-sacrifice.

This feeling of responsibility, though it is affirmed in Dumbledore's office when Harry reviews Snape's memories, is not wholly precipitated by this single event; Rowling refuses to take any sort of psychological shortcut to make Harry a moral agent. Rather, Rowling shows us that Harry's self-consciousness of his duty has been increasing over time with the growth of his self-awareness. It is in a similar manner to the way his appraisal of Snape becomes increasingly accurate and veracious that Harry comes to know and understand himself and his position in the wizarding world. Because we are confined to

Harry's perspective and because he was raised by Muggles, the wizarding world at fist seems like an escape from the cares and concerns of reality. As Harry becomes more and more emerged in the wizarding world, however, he also becomes more and more aware of the social and political issues that concern his new community. Like Austen, Rowling only reveals the events, affairs, and problems that are part of her fictional reality when they touch her protagonist's life. For example, in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry is unaware that Sirius Black is a dangerous wizard on the loose until he is told by Stan Shunpike that the man he saw on the Muggle television had escaped from wizard prison. Even with this information, Harry is at first only affected by Black peripherally; he is inconvenienced and troubled by the Dementors that have been placed around the school grounds by the Ministry ostensibly to protect *all* of the students from the madman. It is only when he overhears a conversation in Hogsmeade about Black's relationship to Harry's parents that he realizes that Black is after *him* in particular and, consequently, Black becomes a source of interest and concern to Harry. Similarly, and in *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry becomes more aware of the political and societal undercurrents of the wizarding community when he hears Malfoy call Hermione "you filthy little Mudblood."[527] Though he had previously made note of Malfoy's sneering attitude toward Muggle-born wizards and knew of Slytherin's preference for students with a wizarding lineage, it is only when his own friend is the victim of this prejudicial language that Harry becomes more cognizant of the injustice of discrimination. Likewise when Hermione (who is always leagues ahead of Harry in her emotional maturity and her commitment to social justice) creates the organization S. P. E. W. (Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare), Harry is at first almost completely indifferent to the cause.

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[527] J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 86.

However, as he becomes more attuned to the way many wizards mistreat house-elves by witnessing the experiences of Dobby, Winky, and Kreacher, Harry, too, begins to stand up for their rights and promote their welfare. Harry therefore first becomes an advocate for social equality because it affects his life. As he matures, however, his generosity of feeling expands to incorporate all those who are abused or oppressed so that he no longer has to be personally affected to stand up for injustice. This, in turn, makes him a more empathetic and responsible wizard and human being.

For example, at the start of *Half-Blood Prince*, we witness a change in Harry's behavior and attitude from *Order of the Phoenix*. In this book, Harry is chastened by the unnecessary death of Sirius and his month at the Dursley's is spent regretting his actions, but also coming to terms with his own faults. Contrary to his beliefs in *Order of the Phoenix*, in this book Harry realizes that he was wrong to willfully disregard the thoughts and desires of others in favor of his own. His previous belief in the faultlessness of his perspective has been modified by contemplating how his self-absorption led to actions that negatively affected other people in his community. Therefore, from the outset of this book Harry is willing to accompany Dumbledore and to help his Headmaster on a matter of business for the Order without offering any suggestions of his own as to their course of action. He is finally able to imagine himself in Dumbledore's position and understand why his Headmaster kept certain things[528] from him until Harry was old enough and mature enough to handle them. After having witnessed Dumbledore's selfless behavior for six years and feeling shame for the way he treated Dumbledore the previous year, in *Half-Blood Prince*

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[528] Like, for instance, the prophesy involving Harry and Lord Voldemort and the magical protection that Harry enjoys at the Dursley home because of Harry's mother's sacrifice.

Harry can put aside his own pride and be the accomplice instead of the hero, an act of humility that he repeats when he and Dumbledore go to the cave to destroy the Horcrux at the end of the novel.

Half-Blood Prince concerns itself with the investigation of Voldemort's past, but through this study Harry also comes to a greater awareness of himself. Again, as with letters in Austen's novels (for example, the letter Frank Churchill sends to Mrs. Weston detailing his secret engagement to Jane Fairfax in *Emma* which, by providing us with Frank's perspective, permits us to better understand his behavior in Highbury), by studying various people's memories of Voldemort in the Pensieve Harry and Dumbledore are able to come to a greater understanding of Voldemort's motivations, desires, and *modus operandi*. By tracing Voldemort's tendencies and patterns of behavior in the memories, Harry learns of Voldemort's excessive pride in his own abilities that leads the latter to believe that he is better than all other human (and non-human) beings. He also witnesses Voldemort's unyielding and unforgiving personality and his obsession with secrecy. This knowledge aids Harry and Dumbledore in their attempt to identify, find, and destroy Voldemort's secret Horcruxes that bind him to life. For example, thanks to Hokey the house-elf's memory of the young and greedy Tom Riddle, Harry and Dumbledore understand that in his vanity Voldemort sought objects that belonged to the Hogwarts founders (Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin) in order to lend more drama and significance to his Horcruxes. Knowing this, Harry and Dumbledore are aware that they must search for objects that are tied to the identities of the founders, like, for example, the diadem of Ravenclaw. But, more importantly for the overarching goals of Rowling's narrative, this knowledge of Voldemort's identity and Voldemort's perception of himself is also valuable to Harry

because it instigates an investigation and evaluation of his own character, motivations, and desires.

For example, when Harry reviews Dumbledore's memory of telling the young Voldemort (Tom Riddle, Jr.) that he is a wizard, he takes note of the marked difference in Riddle's reaction to his own reaction when Hagrid revealed Harry's wizarding lineage. In the memory, Riddle says:

> 'I knew I was different,' he whispered to his own quivering fingers. 'I knew I was special. Always, I knew there was something.'[529]

Harry, remembering his own disbelief and protestations in *Philosopher's Stone*, immediately says to Dumbledore:

> 'He believed it much quicker than I did – I mean, when you told him that he was a wizard,' said Harry. 'I didn't believe Hagrid at first, when he told me.'[530]

Here, having been troubled by the Voldemort's statements in *Goblet of Fire* that he and Harry share similarities, Harry places his own experience next to Voldemort's in order to see how he differs from his enemy. Throughout the rest of the book, Harry and Dumbledore proceed to study the memories that they have acquired and this investigation permits Harry to reflect upon his own life, to compare his actions and motivations with those of Voldemort, and, finally, to decide to work against him. The careful perusal of these memories therefore becomes crucial to Harry's moral growth because, as he comes to

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[529] Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 254.

[530] Ibid., 258.

understand Voldemort's faults, Harry uses him as a model of what he *does not* want to become. Over the course of the series, Harry has seen the results of Voldemort's life-long hubris: he uses his power and his self-generated title (Lord Voldemort) to manipulate people in order to get what he desires at all costs.   Therefore, as I will now explain, when Harry is twice faced with an unexpected visit and request from the Minister for Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, in *Half-Blood Prince*, his moral education is at such a point that he knows enough about his own desires and character to refuse Scrimgeour's demands, though once he might have believed that Scrimgeour's ideas aligned with his own. Instead, he is able to identify that his own idea of political responsibility is actually at a variance to Scrimgeour's.

Again, these two moments with Scrimgeour recall an episode in a novel for adults, this time Austen's *Pride and Prejudice.* In his dialogue with Scrimgeour, Harry must employ a similar kind of reasoning as Elizabeth in her conversation with Lady Catherine de Bourgh in order to affirm his integrity of self and promote a more just and equitable society. Indeed, as I will now demonstrate, Harry's interludes with Scrimgeour so greatly resemble Elizabeth's final meeting with Lady Catherine de Bourgh that it could be argued that Rowling chose to model Harry's experience after Elizabeth's in order to intimate that the two protagonists follow the same route to achieve moral agency—and, additionally, to underwrite the complexity and sophistication of her own narrative style.

The structure of the episodes in each novel are the same: In Chapter 56 of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth and her family are interrupted in the course of their morning by the arrival of an unknown carriage which, to their astonishment, bears Lady Catherine de Bourgh. While Elizabeth's mother and sister are intimidated by the great lady's visit ('Mrs Bennet all amazement, though flattered by having a guest of such high importance, received

her with utmost politeness' and, 'with great civility, begged her ladyship to take some refreshment'), Elizabeth, though surprised, maintains her composure and her distance (when Lady Catherine asks if she is well, Austen writes, 'Elizabeth replied very concisely that she was').[531]   When Lady Catherine ('very resolutely, and not very politely, declined eating any thing') rises and asks for Elizabeth to show her the Longbourn grounds, she is obvious in her desire for a private interview: 'Miss Bennet, there seemed to be a prettyish kind of little wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a turn in it, if you will favour me with your company.'[532] As they walk toward the garden, Austen writes:

> 'They proceeded in silence along the gravel walk that led to the
> copse; Elizabeth was determined to make no effort for
> conversation with a woman, who was now more than usually
> insolent and disagreeable.
>   'How could I ever think her like her nephew?' said she, as
> she looked in her face.[533]

Though Elizabeth is at first unaware of it, the purpose of Lady Catherine's visit becomes clear:

> 'You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the
> reason of my journey hither. Your own heart, your own
> conscience, must tell you why I come.'
>   Elizabeth looked with unaffected astonishment.
>   'Indeed, you are mistaken, Madam. I have not been at all
> able to account for the honour of seeing you here.'
> […]
> 'A report of a most alarming nature, reached me two days ago. I
> was told, that not only your sister was on the point of being most
> advantageously married, but that *you*, that Miss Elizabeth Bennet,

[531] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 361.

[532] Ibid., 362.

[533] Ibid., 362-363.

> would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my nephew,
> my own nephew, Mr Darcy. Though I know it must be a
> scandalous falsehood; though I would not injure him so much as to
> suppose the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off
> for this place, that I might make my sentiments known to you.'[534]

Lady Catherine's purpose for traveling to Longbourn is not to deliver a letter from Charlotte Lucas Collins or to show courtesy to Elizabeth, but to instead hear Elizabeth deny the rumor about her impending engagement to Darcy and to extract a promise from her never to enter into such an engagement. Elizabeth, at first neither confirming nor denying the veracity of the report, notes that Lady Catherine's visit, to the outside eye, would indicate that the rumor was true. What follows is a dialogue in which Lady Catherine demands information ('And can you likewise declare, that there is no *foundation* for it?') and tries to breach the boundaries of Elizabeth's private thoughts, while Elizabeth defends herself by protecting her privacy ('I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship. *You* may ask questions which *I* shall not choose to answer'). In their exchange, Elizabeth cleverly manipulates Lady Catherine's own language in order to avoid her impertinent questions as well as to subtly undermine Lady Catherine's insulting presumption ('This is not to be born. Miss Bennet, I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?'; 'Your ladyship declared it to be impossible'). Lady Catherine proceeds to try to "work on" Elizabeth by telling her that it is her duty as a conscious but nevertheless inferior member of genteel society to obey Lady Catherine's demands and refuse what would be for Elizabeth a superior position as the wife of Mr. Darcy ('Do you pay no regard to the wishes of his friends?; Are you lost to every feeling of propriety and delicacy?; 'Because honour,

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[534] Ibid., 363.

decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it. Yes, Miss Bennet, interest'; 'If you were

sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere, in which you have been

brought up'). The climax of the scene comes with Elizabeth's absolute rejection of Lady

Catherine's requisitions:

> 'Tell me once and for all, are you engaged to him?'
> Though Elizabeth would not, for the mere purpose of
> obliging Lady Catherine, have answered this question; she could
> not but say, after a moment's deliberation,
> 'I am not.'
> Lady Catherine seemed pleased.
> 'And will you promise me, never to enter into such an
> engagement?'
> 'I will make no promise of the kind.'
> 'Miss Bennet I am shocked and astonished. I expected to
> find a more reasonable young woman. But do not deceive yourself
> into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away, till you
> have given me the reassurance I require.'
> 'And I certainly never shall give it. I am not to be
> intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your ladyship
> wants Mr Darcy to marry your daughter; but would my giving you
> the wished-for promise, make *their* marriage at all more probable?
> Supposing him to be attached to me, would *my* refusing to accept
> his hand, make him wish to bestow it on his cousin? Allow me to
> say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have
> supported this extraordinary application, have been as frivolous as
> the application was ill-judged. You have widely mistaken my
> character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as
> these. …'[535]

Elizabeth, after consideration, agrees to tell the truth about her unengaged status, but will not

enter into any promises involving Mr. Darcy. She asserts that Lady Catherine's arguments

to support the idea that Elizabeth should never align herself with Mr. Darcy are

"unreasonable" and "frivolous," and that to say that Elizabeth would be acting without

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[535] Ibid., 366.

honor, duty, or prudence if she married Mr. Darcy is absurd.   What is more, Lady

Catherine's sense of her own generosity ('Is this your gratitude for my attentions to you last

spring? Is nothing due to me on that score?'[536]) is ludicrously distorted, so Elizabeth

therefore believes that she does not owe Lady Catherine any gratitude for her insulting,

domineering, and altogether "ill-bred" behavior in the past ('…she is very welcome, as I

have often told her, to come to Rosings every day, and play on the piano forte in Mrs

Jenkinson's room. She would be in nobody's way, you know, in that part of the house'[537]).

Thus, Elizabeth returns to the Bennet house with her privacy and her integrity of self intact.

Additionally, Elizabeth's arguments underline her belief in social mobility and promote the

idea that people should be judged based on their character and not their rank or economic

situation.

The two visits from Rufus Scrimgeour to the Weasley home in the *Harry Potter*

series are structured in the same way as the episode with Lady Catherine: In both instances,

the Weasley family members are astonished that the Minister of Magic would visit their

home ('Please, come in, sit down, Minister!' fluttered Mrs Weasley, straightening her hat.

'Have a little purkey, or some tooding … I mean –'[538]) and Scrimgeour refuses refreshment,

desiring to speak to Harry on his own, but trying (and failing) not to be obvious about his

true motivations. He says to the company at large:

> '… we've only looked in for five minutes, so I'll have a stroll
> around the yard while you catch up with Percy. No, no, I assure
> you I don't want to butt in! Well, if anybody cared to show me

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[536] Ibid., 365.

[537] Ibid., 207.

[538] Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 320.

your charming garden … ah, that young man's finished, why doesn't he take a stroll with me?'

[…]

　　'Yeah, all right,' said Harry into the silence.

[…]

　　'Wonderful!' said Scrimgeour, standing back to let Harry pass through the door ahead of him. We'll just take a turn around the garden and then Percy and I'll be off. Carry on, everyone!'[539]

The style of the passage and Scrimgeour's choice of words, ("take a turn"; "charming garden") so closely imitates Austen's language ("prettyish kind of little wilderness"; "glad to take a turn") that Rowling gives us a clue as to the nature of Scrimgeour's visit. Like Lady Catherine who, as Darcy's "nearest relation" and the matriarch of his family, believes herself to be entitled to know and direct "all of his dearest concerns," Scrimgeour is desirous of Harry's compliance with his plans and wishes to extract a promise from Harry in order to help him in his schemes involving the wizarding community of which he is the leader.[540] Harry, mirroring Elizabeth, makes no effort for conversation and waits for Scrimgeour to open hostilities:

　　　　Harry walked across the yard to the Weasley's overgrown, snow-covered garden, Scrimgeour limping slightly at his side. He had, Harry knew, been Head of the Auror Office; he looked tough and battle-scarred, very different from portly Fudge in his bowler hat.

[…]

　　　　Harry said nothing. He could tell Scrimgeour was watching him.

　　　　'I've wanted to meet you for a very long time,' said Scrimgeour, after a few moments. 'Did you know that?'

　　　　'No,' said Harry truthfully.

　　　　'Oh yes, for a very long time. But Dumbledore has been very protective of you,' said Scrimgeour. 'Natural, of course,

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[539] Ibid., 320-321.

[540] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 364.

> natural, after what you've been through … especially what
> happened at the Ministry …'
>
> He waited for Harry to say something, but Harry did not
> oblige, so he went on, 'I have been hoping for an occasion to talk
> to you ever since I gained office, but Dumbledore has – most
> understandably, as I say – prevented this.'
>
> Still Harry said nothing, waiting.[541]

As Harry and Scrimgeour continue their walk through the Weasley's "overgrown" garden (incidentally, a word which recalls Austen's "wilderness"), Scrimgeour attempts to invade the privacy of Harry's thoughts and gauge whether or not Harry is aware of and willing to discuss the rumors that are circulating about him in the wizarding community:

> 'The rumours that have flown around!' said Scrimgeour.
> 'Well, of course, we both know how these stories get distorted …
> all these whispers of a prophecy … of you being the "Chosen One"
> …'[542]

If we replace "prophecy" with "engagement," we see how closely Harry and Elizabeth's situations are aligned in the language of this episode. As they walk, Harry, for his part, is also appraising Scrimgeour's character and motives. Like Elizabeth, he deliberates before deciding to give Scrimgeour a direct answer to his question of whether or not he and Dumbledore had discussed the idea of his being the "Chosen One," but he will go no farther in allowing Scrimgeour access to the truth about his identity or situation as it regards the prophecy.

Scrimgeour and Lady Catherine, though their methods are similar, desire different results regarding the rumors about the protagonists. While Lady Catherine wishes Elizabeth

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[541] Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 321.

[542] Ibid., 322.

to *deny* her status as engaged to Mr. Darcy and therefore to have the report of it "universally contradicted," Scrimgeour desires Harry to *confirm* his identity as the Chosen One and to spread that knowledge to the rest of the wizarding community.[543] Unlike Lady Catherine for whom knowing the truth is essential, to Scrimgeour the truth is of no consequence. However, both Scrimgeour and Lady Catherine are concerned about appearances:

> 'Oh, of course, if it's a question of confidences, I wouldn't want you to divulge … no, no … and in any case, does it really matter whether you are the Chosen One or not?'
> Harry had to mull that one over for a few seconds before responding.
> 'I don't really know what you mean, Minister.'
> 'Well, of course, to *you* it will matter enormously,' said Scrimgeour with a laugh. 'But to the wizarding community at large … it's all perception, isn't it? It's what people believe that's important.'
> […]
> 'People believe you *are* the Chosen One, you see,' said Scrimgeour. 'They think you are quite the hero – which, of course, you are, Harry, chosen or not! How many times have you faced He Who Must Not Be Named now? Well, anyway,' he pressed on, without waiting for a reply, 'the point is, you are a symbol of hope for many, Harry. The idea that there is someone out there who might be able, who might even be *destined*, to destroy He Who Must Not Be Named – well, naturally, it gives people a lift. And I can't help but feel that, once you realise this, you might consider it, well, almost a duty, to stand alongside the Ministry, and give everyone a boost.'[544]

Scrimgeour here reveals his true motive in coming to the Weasley home: to get Harry to agree to acknowledge that the rumors about him are true: that Harry is the Chosen One, destined to fight and defeat Lord Voldemort. Like Lady Catherine, he proceeds to try

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[543] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 363.

[544] Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 323.

and persuade Harry to his way of thinking by telling him that it is his duty as a conscious member of the wizarding community to "give everyone a boost" regardless of whether or not the feeling of safety that it would inspire is based upon fact. In exchange for Harry's compliance, Scrimgeour would "arrange" for Harry to acquire his dream job of being an Auror. However, like Elizabeth, who cares not whether she is "noticed by [Mr. Darcy's] family or friends" or if she will be "censured, slighted, and despised, by everyone connected with him," Harry is not to be tempted by the connections that he might make at the Auror office or blackmailed into forging a promise with Scrimgeour in order to assure the beneficence and not the animosity of these elite members of the Ministry.[545]

The climax of the episode in the garden, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, comes with the protagonist's direct refusal to be influenced or manipulated into acquiescing to the demands of the person who, in his community, has a superior and more powerful position:

> 'So basically,' he said, as though he just wanted to clarify a few points, 'you'd like to give the impression that I'm working for the Ministry?'
> 'It would give everyone a lift to think you were more involved, Harry,' said Scrimgeour, sounding relieved that Harry had cottoned on so quickly. 'The "Chosen One", you know … it's all about giving people hope, the feeling that exciting things are happening …'
> 'But if I keep running in and out of the Ministry,' said Harry, still endeavoring to keep his voice friendly, 'won't that seem as though I approve of what the Ministry's up to?'
> 'Well,' said Scrimgeour, frowning slightly, 'well, yes, that's partly why we'd like –'
> 'No, I don't think that'll work,' said Harry pleasantly. 'You see, I don't like some of the things the Ministry is doing. Locking up Stan Shunpike, for instance.'[546]

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[545] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 365.

[546] Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 325.

In the way he responds to Scrimgeour, we see Harry employ the lessons he has learned throughout the series. Not only is he able to temper his emotions as he was unable to do with Minister for Magic Fudge or Senior Undersecretary Umbridge, but he is also able to see through Scrimgeour's plans. Where he was once oblivious to the machinations of the Ministry (for instance, in *Prisoner of Azkaban* when Harry was fooled by former Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge into thinking that Sirius Black was a danger to everyone and not just himself and, in *Order of the Phoenix* when he didn't realize that the Dementors were sent by Dolores Umbridge to get him expelled from school), Harry is now able to perceive the motivations behind Scrimgeour's request. He realizes that though they are ostensibly fighting on the same side and desiring the same thing (the defeat of Lord Voldemort), in deceiving the wizarding community and making unwarranted arrests in order to promote a false sense of security the Ministry is not acting so very differently than Voldemort by focusing on ends and not means.

> 'I don't want to be used,' said Harry.
> 'Some would say it's your duty to be used by the Ministry!'
> 'Yeah, and others might say it's your duty to check people really are Death Eaters before you chuck them in prison,' said Harry, his temper rising now. 'You're doing what Barty Crouch did. You never get it right, you people, do you? Either we've got Fudge, pretending everything's lovely while people get murdered right under his nose, or we've got you, chucking the wrong people into jail and trying to pretend you've got the Chosen One working for you!'
> 'So you're not the Chosen One?' said Scrimgeour.
> 'I thought you said it didn't matter either way?' said Harry, with a bitter laugh. 'Not to you, anyway.'[547]

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[547] Ibid., 325.

Thus, Harry finds that he cannot cooperate with Scrimgeour because, as he affirms in his second interview with Scrimgeour in *Deathly Hallows*, he does not like the Ministry's methods. In this manner, Harry is able to weigh the benefits of Scrimgeour's offer (that he would have the protection of Aurors and that he could become an Auror himself) against his integrity of self in order to determine the most responsible course of action for his community. Because Harry has seen Voldemort use his power and his title to manipulate people in order to get what he wants, Harry can see that, by acquiescing to Scrimgeour's request, he would be thinking and behaving like Voldemort. Like Elizabeth, Harry uses Scrimgeour's own language to show him the unreasonableness and vacuousness of his request.   Harry, who has come to understand that moral authority necessitates the existence of and adherence to the truth, believes that Scrimgeour, in devaluing the veracity of Harry's identity as the Chosen One in his selfish desire for the support of the wizarding community at all costs, abdicates the responsibility and respect that comes with his office. Harry shows Scrimgeour his right hand upon which the Undersecretary to the Minister Dolores Umbridge made him inscribe in his skin "*I must not tell lies*" in order to further demonstrate the hypocrisy of the Ministry. And, additionally, he brings attention to the way the Ministry has taken unfair advantage the citizens it governs by making unwarranted arrests and trying to dupe them into believing that they are winning the war. For these reasons, Harry refuses to aid Scrimgeour; if he did, he would be helping to uphold the injustices that threaten to undermine their democratic government.

Finally, Harry also displays psychological maturity from the previous books when he defends Dumbledore to Scrimgeour and allies himself with his Headmaster although he knows that Dumbledore is still withholding information from him. Harry, who last year was

offended and frustrated by Dumbledore's reticence, now trusts his Headmaster and defends

his privacy as he does his own because Harry is finally able to view the prevailing conflicts

of the series from Dumbledore's empathetic perspective and he knows that they are united in

their feeling of responsibility for their community.

> 'What is Dumbledore up to?' said Scrimgeour brusquely. 'Where does he go, when he is absent from Hogwarts?'
> 'No idea,' said Harry.
> 'And you wouldn't tell me if you knew,' said Scrimgeour, 'would you?'
> 'No, I wouldn't,' said Harry.
> 'Well, then, I shall have to see whether I can't find out by other means.'
> 'You can try,' said Harry indifferently. 'But you seem cleverer than Fudge, so I'd have thought you'd have learned from his mistakes. He tried interfering at Hogwarts. You might have noticed he's not Minister any more, but Dumbledore's still Headmaster. I'd leave Dumbledore alone, if I were you.'
> There was a long pause.
> 'Well, it is clear to me that he has done a very good job on you,' said Scrimgeour, his eyes cold and hard behind his wire-rimmed glasses. 'Dumbledore's man through and through, aren't you, Potter?'
> 'Yeah, I am,' said Harry. 'Glad we straightened that out.'
> And turning his back on the Minister for Magic, he strode back towards the house.[548]

As Lady Catherine misapprehended Elizabeth's character, Harry demonstrates to

Scrimgeour that his "extraordinary application" was equally ill-judged; he, too, is not to be

"worked on by such persuasions as these"; like Dumbledore, Harry will not abuse his power

for selfish gain. Thus, if we place Rowling's *Harry Potter series* next to the works of Jane

Austen, we can see that Rowling's protagonist and Austen's protagonists achieve moral

authority in the same way—through self-awareness, self-investigation, and self-

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[548] Ibid., 326.

consciousness of their responsibility to promote a more just and ethical society. Rowling,

by including a political aspect to Harry's moral education, raises the stakes of her narrative

by ensuring that his journey to moral agency affects not only his circle of friends but also his

entire community.

The Final Test

In *Deathly Hallows*, when Harry is recurrently applied to by Scrimgeour to reveal

that he is the one destined to defeat Lord Voldemort, Harry again refuses to work with the

Ministry because of the way they are handling the war.[549] Indeed, Scrimgeour's methods to

which Harry had objected in *Half-Blood Prince* had led to widespread confusion and fear in

the community during the previous novel, which made it easier for Voldemort to assume

control. Thus, Harry finds himself and his decisions vindicated at the start of the last book.

Harry's greatest struggle to achieve moral authority, however, actually occurs later on in this

final novel when he finds out about the Deathly Hallows. To show us the complex moral

reasoning that Harry must undertake in order to achieve moral authority, Rowling again

adopts and adapts another text from adult literature.

If we examine the cautionary tale (*The Tale of the Three Brothers*) that exists within

the framing narrative of *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows*, and scrutinize the

circumstances under which the story is conveyed to Harry, we recognize a likeness to

another tale-within-a-tale: *The Pardoner's Tale* in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. With

The Tale of the Three Brothers, Rowling, like Chaucer, creates a story about meeting death

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[549] This is the Second Wizarding War, which began in earnest with the death of Dumbledore, but
which was set in motion by the events in the graveyard of Little Hangleton in *Goblet of Fire*.

through one's own avarice and hubris and, what is more, complicates the meaning of the tale

through the conditions of the frame narrative. In Chaucer's tale, it is the Pardoner who

conveys the story and its message to the pilgrims, but though his tale is a traditional one in

that it warns against the evils of greed through the actions of three men, the Pardoner

himself calls into question the meaning of story through his own identity and actions. First,

the Pardoner's general appearance is described in the General Prologue as being extremely

eccentric:

> This Pardoner hadde heer as yellow as wex,
> But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;
> By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,
> And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;
> […]
> A voys he hadde as small as hath a goot.
> No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have;
> As smothe it was as it were late shave.
> I trowe he were a gelding or a mare.[550]

Here, with his over-long yellow hair, his high voice, and his unnaturally smooth cheeks, the

Pardoner is depicted as strange and unmanly and the portrait verges on animalistic when he

is compared to a gelding or a mare. Additionally, the Pardoner is described as having about

his person many phony relics and false artifacts, further incriminating him as a fraud:

> For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,
> Which that he seyde was Oure Lady veyl;
> He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seyl
> That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he wente
> Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hum hente.[551]

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[550] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The General Prologue," lines 675-679 and 688-691, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[551] Ibid., lines 694-698.

Indeed, in the prologue to his story, the Pardoner admits to the rest of the company that he is a hypocrite and cheats his parishioners and, what is more, fully intends to lie, steal, and win the storytelling competition. When he finishes his telling, he immediately proceeds to attempt to cheat the pilgrims, just as he warned them that he would do. Thus, the Pardoner's presentation of himself is contrary to what is expected by his listeners who assume, because of his role in the church, that he would not take advantage of them. Therefore, though he is aware of his transgressions and admits them to the pilgrims, ultimately his violation of his position in society results in the defamation of his character in the General Prologue and ends with the host's violent outburst against him in the epilogue.

Like the hypocritical and untrustworthy Pardoner, Xenophilius Lovegood certainly turns out to be unreliable and duplicitous in addition to being extremely eccentric. Harry is first introduced to him at the wedding of Bill and Fleur and he is described as:

> Slightly cross-eyed, with shoulder-length white hair the texture of candyfloss, he wore a cap whose tassel dangled in front of his nose and robes of an eye-watering shade of egg-yolk yellow. An odd symbol, rather like a triangular eye, glistened from a gold chain around his neck.[552]

Here, not only does Xenophilius resemble the Pardoner in his hair and dress, but he also carries with him a false talisman, what he believes to be a sign that reveals him to other wizards as a believer in the Deathly Hallows, but which is actually the sign of a Dark wizard.[553] In this way, by the manner in which Xenophilius's character is subtly allied to

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[552] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 117.

[553] As mentioned previously, the sign of the Deathly Hallows, like the swastika, took on a more sinister connotation when it was adopted by a tyrannical leader.

that of the Pardoner, we are given clues to his identity and role in the narrative. And, indeed, when Harry, Ron, and Hermione arrive at Xenophilius's home, because Xenophilius is the editor of *The Quibbler* (a periodical that has allied itself with Harry and the anti-Voldemort movement), they do not expect him to take advantage of their vulnerability and turn them over to the Death Eaters. Like the Pardoner, Xenophilius is aware of the shame of his hypocrisy, though, unlike the Pardoner, Xenophilius has a more understandable and pitiable motivation for his betrayal of Harry's and the wizarding community's trust in him: his daughter, Luna, was taken by the Death Eaters,[554] and therefore Xenophilius plans to use Harry as a way to bargain with Luna's captors in order to retrieve her. However, again similar to the Pardoner, Xenophilius discusses *The Tale of the Three Brothers* in order to dupe his listeners and, even when his true motives are uncovered, he is determined to betray Harry in order to "win" back his daughter. As Harry reads Xenophilius's treachery in his visage, Rowling imitates Chaucer's comparison of the Pardoner to a horse when she describes Xenophilius's face: "Xenophilius looked ghastly, a century old, his lips drawn back into a dreadful leer."[555] It is fitting, then, that Xenophilius's story ends with another, literal outburst: the explosion of the Erumpent horn and the destruction of his printing press.

But it is the way that Rowling employs the episode with Xenophilius to illuminate the necessity of empathy and humility for moral agency and the necessity and adherence to truth for moral authority that demonstrates the sophistication of her narrative. Harry's opinion of Xenophilius and his story changes throughout the seventh novel, a shift that

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[554] Harry, Ron, and Hermione are ignorant of Luna's situation and thus do not suspect Xenophilius's treachery.

[555] Ibid., 340.

mirrors Harry's moral education.   At first, when confronted with Xenophilius at the

wedding, Harry (like the narrator in the General Prologue) sees Xenophilius as a ridiculous

figure and considers Xenophilius's belief in the Hallows as one of his many crackpot ideas,

lumping it in with his fervent obsession with the non-existent Crumple-Horned Snorkack

and his faith in the healthy benefits of gnome bites. When Viktor Krum confronts

Xenophilius about the offensiveness of his necklace, Harry defends him:

> 'Well, there's a chance,' said Harry, 'that Xenophilius doesn't
> actually know what the symbol means. The Lovegoods are quite
> … unusual. He could easily have picked it up somewhere and
> think it's a cross-section of the head of a Crumple-Horned
> Snorkack or something.'[556]

As the novel continues, even as the symbol persistently appears, Harry remains confident in

his assessment of Xenophilius as well as in his belief that the symbol has no relevant

significance to his own investigation into Voldemort's plans. When Hermione is intrigued

by the appearance of the symbol on the Peverell grave in Godric's Hollow, Harry dismisses

it as beneath his notice, impatient to find the grave that most interests him: ''I'm going to

keep looking for my parents, all right?' Harry told her, a slight edge to his voice, and he set

off again, leaving her crouched beside the old grave.'[557] However, when he hears *The Tale

of the Three Brothers*[558] in Xenophilius's house and hears Xenophilius explain their

relationship to the Hallows (the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and The Cloak of

Invisibility), Harry becomes intrigued by the objects and their power. When Hermione

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[556] Ibid., 124.

[557] Ibid., 268.

[558] For your reference, I have included the *The Tale of the Three Brothers* at the end of this chapter.

questions the validity of the objects' existence, arguing that there is no mention of the

Deathly Hallows in the tale itself, Xenophilius tells them:

> 'Well, of course not,' said Xenophilius, maddeningly smug. That is a children's tale, told to amuse rather than instruct. Those of us who understand these matters, however, recognise that the ancient story refers to three objects, of Hallows, which, if united, will make the possessor master of Death.'[559]

Here, Xenophilius's resemblance to the Pardoner is highlighted by his "smug" demeanor

and in the way in which he manipulates his language in order to convince his listeners of the

truth of his argument. First, by substituting "amuse" for "instruct" and then "instruct" for

"amuse," Xenophilius attempts to undermine the validity of the children's morality tale by

denying its purpose: to instruct against greed and hubris. He brushes the tale aside as

frivolous entertainment and, by referring to believers like himself as "those of us who

understand these matters," instead attempts to affirm the superiority of the quest for the

Deathly Hallows by calling into question the intelligence of any doubters.

The atmosphere that Rowling creates here again recalls her Middle English

predecessor. In *The Canterbury Tales*, each character expresses a distinct view of reality

that offers the listeners—and the readers—different truths. These varying perspectives on

what is real and what is valid create an atmosphere of relativism in the *Canterbury Tales,*

which prevents the collection from arriving at any sort of absolute truth. When Harry, Ron,

and Hermione hear *The Tale of the Three Brothers* and discuss it with Xenophilius and,

later, among themselves, they come to different conclusions as to which object is the most

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[559] Ibid., 333.

covetable and whether or not the story of the Deathly Hallows is true (which, if so, would

also affirm the existence of these objects in reality):

> 'It's just a morality tale, it's obvious which gift is best, which one
> you'd choose –'
> The three of them spoke at the same time; Hermione said, 'the
> Cloak,' Ron said, 'the wand,' and Harry said, 'the stone.'[560]

Thus, as in the *Canterbury Tales*, an atmosphere of relativism pervades the rest of their visit

(and, indeed, the days and weeks that follow it): Hermione is certain that the Deathly

Hallows do not exist; Ron is less dubious although he determines to be disinterested in order

to devote himself to finding the Horcruxes; Harry is convinced of the Hallows' existence

and, what is more, becomes determined to possess them, especially the Elder Wand. By

imitating Xenophilius's blind faith and presumption that he could unite the Hallows and be

worthy to be Master of Death, Harry falls back into his pattern of believing in the rightness

of his own point of view. He chafes against the rational perspective offered by Hermione

and (though to a lesser extent) Ron. In this way, Harry abandons the self-awareness, self-

investigation, and self-consciousness of his responsibility to his community that make him a

moral agent. Ultimately then, at least for a time, Xenophilius succeeds; not only had Harry

been duped by Xenophilius's false hospitality at his home, but also, by believing

Xenophilius about the Hallows and presuming that he could be the one to unite them and

conquer Voldemort and death, in the weeks that follow the episode in the Lovegood home,

Harry loses his humility and, through this, his empathy. Instead of thinking about the way

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[560] Ibid., 336.

the Hallows might affect his community, Harry is unable to think of anything but his own safety and power:

> *Three objects, of Hallows, which, if united, will make the possessor master of Death … master … conqueror … vanquisher … the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death …*
> And he saw himself, possessor of the Hallows, facing Voldemort, whose Horcruxes were no match … *neither can live while the other survives* … was this the answer? Hallows versus Horcruxes? Was there a way, after all, to ensure that he was the one who triumphed? If he were the master of the Deathly Hallows, would he be safe?[561]

When Harry, Ron, and Hermione return to their tent, Harry tries to convince the others that possessing the Hallows, rather than finding and destroying Horcruxes, should be their mission. He believes that he has only to find the Elder Wand to unite the three Hallows because he is convinced that his Invisibility Cloak is one of the Hallows and that the Resurrection Stone is hidden in the Golden Snitch left to him by Dumbledore in his will. He is frustrated by Dumbledore's obscure message on the Snitch ("I open at the close") that prevents him from opening it, desiring to begin this new mission immediately. This urgency is due to Harry's realization that the Elder Wand is the object Voldemort has been pursuing throughout the entirety of this novel and Harry wants to beat him to it.[562] He also realizes that Voldemort, because their similar upbringings, would also not have heard of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* and thus would not know that the "Death Stick" or the "Wand of Destiny"

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[561] Ibid., 348.

[562] Because of his connection to Voldemort, Harry sometimes dreams or has visions of what is happening in Voldemort's reality. Since the first pages of *Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort has kidnapped, tortured, and killed wand makers and has travelled all over Europe seeking something that Harry now identifies as the Elder Wand.

is actually also one of three Hallows. Therefore, Voldemort would be ignorant of "this last great wizarding secret": that only the person who unites *all three* Hallows will be master of Death.[563]

Harry, in presuming that he could be the one to unite the Hallows, falls back into his earlier way of thinking about himself and his role. Instead of humbly accepting the thankless and tedious mission of destroying the Horcruxes, he tries to take a more glamorous shortcut to the defeat of Voldemort. In this way, by trying to fit his own experience into the legend of the Deathly Hallows, he again begins to put faith in a heroic rather than a realistic identity:

> 'Harry,' said Hermione, moving across to him and handing him back Lily's letter, 'I'm sorry, but I think you've got this wrong, all wrong.'
> 'But don't you see? It all fits –'
> 'No, it doesn't,' she said. 'It *doesn't*, Harry, you're just getting carried away. Please,' she said, as he started to speak, 'please just answer me this. If the Deathly Hallows really existed, and Dumbledore knew about them, knew that the person who possessed all three of them would be master of Death – Harry, why wouldn't he have told you? Why?'
> He had his answer ready.
> 'But you said it, Hermione! You've got to find out about them for yourself! It's a Quest!'
> 'But I only said that to try and persuade you to come to the Lovegoods'!' cried Hermione in exasperation. 'I didn't really believe it!'
> Harry took no notice.
> 'Dumbledore usually let me find out stuff for myself. He let me try my strength, take risks. This feels like the kind of thing he'd do.'
> 'Harry, this isn't a game, this isn't practice! This is the real thing, and Dumbledore left you very clear instructions: find and destroy the Horcruxes! That symbol doesn't mean anything, forget the Deathly Hallows, we can't afford to get sidetracked –'

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[563] Ibid., 351.

> Harry was barely listening to her. He was turning the
> Snitch over and over in his hands, half expecting it to break open,
> to reveal the Resurrection Stone, to prove to Hermione that he was
> right, that the Deathly Hallows were real.'[564]

As Hermione tries to reason with Harry in the above passage, Harry is equally intent upon

persuading her to accept his ideas. Interestingly, both Harry and Hermione are partially

correct in their assumptions about the Hallows. Hermione, though she is mistaken that the

Hallows do not exist, is correct in thinking that, regardless of the Hallows' authenticity,

Dumbledore wanted them to focus on destroying the Horcruxes, not obtaining the Hallows.

Harry's situation is again similar to Austen's Emma Woodhouse. In *Emma*, Emma

discovers that Jane Fairfax has a secret involving an unsuitable or impossible love interest,

but she is totally incorrect in assuming that the object of Jane's affection is Mr. Dixon, and

thus her efforts to get to the bottom of the secret actually do more harm than good. In

Deathly Hallows, Harry is correct that Dumbledore left clues about the Hallows for

Hermione to discover, but he is totally incorrect in assuming that Dumbledore wanted him to

possess the Elder Wand, and, in pursuing the Hallows, Harry, like Emma, also does more

harm than good. While Hermione tries to show Harry that heroic fantasy isn't equal to their

reality ("This isn't a game!"; "This is the real thing"; "That symbol doesn't mean

anything"), by employing the language of legends and fairy tales ("It's a Quest!"; "try my

strengths"; "take risks"), Harry demonstrates his wish for the self-importance that comes

with being a hero and his hope for the destined success of the Chosen One. He ignores

Hermione, and continues to ponder the mystery of the Hallows:

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[564] Ibid.

> And the wand, the Elder Wand, where was that hidden? Where was Voldemort searching now? Harry wished his scar would burn and show him Voldemort's thoughts, because for the first time ever, he and Voldemort were united in wanting the very same thing … Hermione would not like that idea, of course … but then, she did not believe … Xenophilius had been right, in a way … *Limited. Narrow. Close-minded.* The truth was that she was scared of the idea of the Deathly Hallows, especially of the Resurrection Stone … and Harry pressed his mouth[565] again to the Snitch, kissing it, nearly swallowing it, but the cold metal did not yield …[566]

Here, Harry turns against Hermione, who all along has been not only his moral corrective, but also his truest and most loyal friend. In his own arrogance and self-absorption, he perceives her unfairly and loses the ability to respect or sympathize with her point of view. He therefore refuses to believe that the reason she does not want to pursue the Deathly Hallows has nothing to do with honoring their commitment to Dumbledore and to their community (because they are the only three who know about the Horcruxes to destroy them), but rather simply because she is afraid. Similarly, as Harry denies what he has learned thus far in his moral education, i.e. the ability to experience and sympathize with other perspectives, his capacity for empathy and his commitment to social responsibility also diminish:

> It was nearly dawn when he remembered Luna, alone in a cell in Azkaban, surrounded by Dementors, and he suddenly felt ashamed of himself. He had forgotten all about her in his feverish contemplation of the Hallows. If only they could rescue her, but Dementors in those numbers would be virtually unassailable. Now

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[565] Snitches have flesh memories so that, during a Quidditch match, if there is any doubt as to which player touched the Snitch first, there is a way to discover who gets the one-hundred and fifty points. Harry caught this Snitch in his first ever Quidditch match, but he caught it in his mouth, so the Snitch would only respond to the touch of his lips, not his fingers.

[566] Ibid., 352.

he came to think about it, he had not yet tried casting a Patronus
with the blackthorn wand … he must try that in the morning …
If only there was a way of getting a better wand …
And desire for the Elder Wand, the Deathstick, unbeatable,
invincible, swallowed him once more …[567]

In remembering Luna, Harry experiences a momentary feeling of shame and responsibility, but it becomes overwhelmed by his obsession with the Elder Wand and his longing for his own safety and power. In this way, not only does he resemble Voldemort in their mutual desire for the Elder Wand, but also in their mutual self-absorption.

It is this hubris that leads to Harry, Ron, and Hermione being caught by the Snatchers and taken to Malfoy Manner.[568] Harry, so engrossed in his thoughts about the Elder Wand, carelessly says Voldemort's name aloud after being told repeatedly by Ron that the name was taboo and breaks all protective enchantments.[569] When they arrive at the Malfoys, Hermione is the one chosen to be tortured by Bellatrix, reaffirming the dangerous consequences of Harry's lack of self-awareness for others in his community. Similarly, Dobby, who bravely comes to Harry's rescue and who, like Hermione, also always behaves selflessly in order to promote Harry's welfare, is killed in the crossfire as they escape the Malfoy home.

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[567] Ibid., 352-353.

[568] Incidentally, the smug pompousness of the title the Malfoys bestowed upon their home, "Malfoy Manner," resembles Sir William Lucas's attempt to establish his importance by naming his home "Lucas Lodge."

[569] By making his name taboo, Voldemort is able to track his enemies because it was only the people who were truly serious about fighting him (like Dumbledore and the members of the Order of the Phoenix) who used his name rather than the monikers "He Who Must Not Be Named," "You Know Who," or "the Dark Lord" (the last being the name by which his Death Eaters and supporters referred to him).

This event, in which the two people that love Harry the most are seriously and, for Dobby, irrevocably injured as a direct result of Harry's hubris precipitates Harry's most significant investigation into his own identity and motivations. Like Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* when she realizes that she has been wholly incorrect about Darcy, Harry grows absolutely ashamed of himself and similarly castigates himself for having been so "blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd."[570] In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen is more explicit in revealing to her reader Elizabeth's repentance because she gives us access to Elizabeth's internal dialogue; before we witness Harry's internal dialogue, Rowling more subtly shows us his deep remorse through his decision to dig Dobby's grave without magic. Both writers give us insight into the ways that their protagonists engage in self-investigation to determine their respective courses of action in the future. For Elizabeth, her self-awareness comes with the perusal of Darcy's letter ("she read, and re-read with closest attention"[571]) and the weighing of Darcy's explanations of each past circumstance against her assumptions in order to discover that she was entirely mistaken in believing in the rightness of her perspective ("on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself."[572]). Harry, unlike Elizabeth, does not have a letter (or a Pensieve memory) to give him insight into Dumbledore's motivations for giving him the information about the Hallows (or, indeed, for Dumbledore giving Harry two out of three Hallows outright). Instead, Harry must probe into what he thinks Dumbledore knew about his character in the

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[570] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 236.

[571] Ibid., 234.

[572] Ibid., 236-237.

past and what Dumbledore might have foreseen regarding Harry's reaction to his discovery

of the Deathly Hallows in the present. In this way, his self-consciousness comes through

empathy, by seeing himself through Dumbledore's eyes. As he digs Dobby's grave, he

deliberates for the last time about what he should do:

> The steady rhythm of his arms beat time with his thoughts.
> Hallows … Horcruxes … Hallows … Horcruxes … yet he no
> longer burned with that weird, obsessive longing. Loss and fear
> had snuffed it out: he felt as though he had been slapped awake
> again.
> […]
> And he thought of Wormtail, dead because of one, small,
> unconscious impulse of mercy[573] … Dumbledore had foreseen that
> … how much more had he known?
> […]
> And still his scar prickled, and he knew that Voldemort was
> getting there too. Harry understood, and yet did not understand.
> His instinct was telling him one thing, his brain quite another. The
> Dumbledore in Harry's head smiled, surveying Harry over the tips
> of his fingers, pressed together as if in prayer.
> *You gave Ron the Deluminator. You understood him …*
> *you gave him a way back …*
> *And you understood Wormtail too … you knew there was a*
> *bit of regret there, somewhere …*
> *And if you knew them … what did you know about me,*
> *Dumbledore?*
> *Am I meant to know, but not to seek? Did you know how*
> *hard I'd find that? Is that why you made it this difficult? So I'd*
> *have time to work that out?[574]*

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[573] Wormtail was strangled by his own prosthetic hand when he momentarily relaxed his hold on Harry's throat (Harry had reminded him that he had saved Wormtail's life and that he owed him). In *Goblet of Fire*, Voldemort gave Wormtail the prosthetic hand after he ordered Wormtail to cut his real hand off in order to cast the regeneration spell. When he presented Wormtail with the new hand, he said 'May your loyalty never waver again, Wormtail,' which we realize now meant that the prosthetic hand must have carried a spell that would kill Wormtail if he ever acted contrary to Voldemort's desires.

[574] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 387-391.

In debating his course of action, Harry reviews his own character by imagining himself from Dumbledore's perspective. He sees his own faults: his impulsiveness, his unassailable belief in the accuracy of his own perceptions, and his pride in being a Seeker and a hero, and realizes that he must abandon these instincts in order to choose the right and moral course of action. Therefore, when Bill Weasley asks Harry to whom he'd like to speak first, the goblin Griphook or the wand-maker Ollivander, Harry chooses Griphook, symbolizing his decision to continue to destroy Horcruxes rather than learn how to master the Elder Wand. He also asks Hermione and Ron to join him in the interview, demonstrating his willingness to acknowledge and respect other people's perspectives even if they differ from his own (as, indeed, does Ron's). This episode thus marks the final hurdle in Harry's journey to becoming a moral agent. From this point forward to the end of the series, Harry knows himself and what he must do. Thus, when Harry decides to let Voldemort kill him he acts heroically not because he was destined to do so as the Chosen One and not because he desires any posthumous glory that would come from his sacrifice, but because his moral education throughout the entirety of the book has led him to take the most responsible course of action. He humbly and selflessly accepts that he must die in order to protect his community because Voldemort cannot die unless all of his Horcruxes, including Harry, are destroyed. Thus, Harry enters the forest without fanfare and, indeed, without anyone's knowledge. When he does not die from Voldemort's *Avada Kedavra* curse, we realize that Harry is the true master of death and the worthy possessor of the Hallows not simply because of his destiny, but because of his integrity.

By giving us a sustained portrait of Harry's moral growth, by showing us the world through his evolving perspective, and by demonstrating to us his gradual acquisition of

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experience, knowledge, and power, Rowling provides evidence of the stylistic sophistication, psychological complexity, and authentic semblance to reality that make her series a classic work of literature that defies categorization. Thus, in the way that Rowling demonstrates to us that Harry's defeat of Voldemort is not simply destined, but chosen, she gives us insight into her narrative strategy: she has tricked us in the best possible way. We began by thinking her novels were simply another work of children's fantasy literature in which actions matter more than character development, in which showing matters more than telling, and in which familiarity matters more than intimacy, but we end, like Harry, with an entirely different perspective about his story. Events truly matter in Harry Potter, but so too do the sophisticated style, complex structure, and believable characters. Instead, *Harry Potter* is both a work of fantasy and a work of realism; the series concerns itself with the real and the marvelous, innocence and experience, the adult and the child, the simple and the complex, the expected and the unexpected, and, of course, the ordinary and the magical in order to incorporate both traditions—the tradition of the children's book and the tradition of the adult novel. In this way, Rowling calls attention to the arbitrary boundary that has so long divided the two categories by abolishing it completely.

The Tale of the Three Brothers

There were once three brothers who were traveling along a lonely, winding road at twilight. In time, the brothers reached a river too deep to wade through and too dangerous to swim across. However, these brothers were learned in the magical arts, and so they simply waved their wands and made a bridge appear across the treacherous water. They were halfway across it when they found their path blocked by a hooded figure.

And Death spoke to them. He was angry that he had been cheated out of three new victims, for travelers usually drowned in the river. But Death was cunning. He pretended to congratulate the three brothers upon their magic, and said that each had earned a prize for having been clever enough to evade him.

So the oldest brother, who was a combative man, asked for a wand more powerful than any in existence: a wand that must always win duels for its owner, a wand worthy of a wizard who had conquered Death! So Death crossed to an elder tree on the banks of the river, fashioned a wand from a branch that hung there, and gave it to the oldest brother.

Then the second brother, who was an arrogant man, decided that he wanted to humiliate Death still further, and asked for the power to recall others from Death. So Death picked up a stone from the riverbank and gave it to the second brother, and told him that the stone would have the power to bring back the dead.

And then Death asked the third and youngest brother what he would like. The youngest brother was the humblest and also the wisest of the brothers, and he did not trust Death. So he asked for something that would enable him to go forth from that place without being followed by Death. And Death, most unwillingly, handed over his own Cloak of Invisibility.

Then Death stood aside and allowed the three brothers to continue on their way, and they did so, talking with wonder of the adventure they had had, and admiring Death's gifts. In due course the brothers separated, each for his own destination.

The first brother traveled on for a week or more, and reaching a distant village, sought out a fellow wizard with whom he had a quarrel. Naturally, with the Elder Wand as his weapon, he could not fail to win the duel that followed. Leaving his enemy dead upon the floor, the oldest brother proceeded to an inn, where he boasted loudly of the powerful wand he had snatched from Death himself, and of how it made him invincible.

That very night, another wizard crept upon the oldest brother as he lay, wine-sodden, upon his bed. The thief took the wand and, for good measure, slit the oldest brother's throat.

And so Death took the first brother for his own.

Meanwhile, the second brother journeyed to his own home, where he lived alone. Here he took out the stone that had the power to recall the dead, and turned it thrice in his hand. To his amazement and his delight, the figure of the girl he had once hoped to marry, before her untimely death, appeared at once before him.

Yet she was sad and cold, separated from him as by a veil. Though she had returned to the mortal world, she did not truly belong there and suffered. Finally the second brother, driven mad with hopeless longing, killed himself so as truly to join her.

And so Death took the second brother for his own.

But though Death searched for the third brother for many years, he was never able to find him. It was only when he had attained a great age that the youngest brother finally

took off the Cloak of Invisibility and gave it to his son. And then he greeted Death as an old friend, and went with him gladly, and, equals, they departed this life.

Conclusion
Opening At the Close

> Autumn seemed to arrive suddenly that year. The morning of the first of September was crisp and golden as an apple, and as the little family bobbed across the rumbling road toward the great, sooty station, the fumes of car exhausts and the breath of pedestrians sparkled like cobwebs in the cold air. Two large cages rattled on top of the laden trolleys the parents were pushing; the owls inside them hooted indignantly, and the red-headed girl trailed tearfully behind her brothers, clutching her father's arm.
> 'It won't be long, and you'll be going too,' Harry told her.[575]

In this first paragraph of the Epilogue of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Rowling ends her story where it first began—at Kings Cross Station on the same platform that acted as our portal into the wizarding world. This time, it is Harry's son, Albus Severus Potter, who is boarding the Hogwarts Express and beginning his magical education; the story has come full circle. But in this paragraph we also see that Rowling makes another kind of return—a return to the language, form, and themes of traditional children's literature. The first sentence reads like a picture book, with the morning "crisp and golden as an apple" and the "little family" that "bobbed" across the "rumbling road" to the "great, sooty station." Everything in this passage and in this chapter, even the car exhaust, is beautiful, innocent, and full of promise. The contrast between the simplicity of the Epilogue and the complexity of the rest of the chapters that comprise this book could not be more distinct. Thus, with this magical moment, Rowling shows us just how far her seven-volume narrative and contemporary children's literature have come; they have, like Harry, grown up.

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[575] Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 603.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I claimed there was a revolution occurring in contemporary children's literature that effaces the boundary that long existed between literature for children and literature for adults. By examining the history of children's literature and, most importantly, the turning point instigated by the criticism of Henry James that declared fictions written for children or a common audience to be "lesser" literature, I have explained how and why this separation between children's fiction and adult fiction occurred. Using Rowling's *Harry Potter* series as my primary example, I then demonstrated how the children's literature category is broadening and deepening its identity through changes in its forms, its style, its themes, and its seriousness of purpose. By incorporating both the tradition of the children's book and the tradition of the adult novel in her series, Rowling demonstrates the arbitrariness of the boundary that has long divided the two categories. In the way that she weaves fairy tales, mythologies, and legends as well as heroic fantasy and the school story into her novels, she shows us that her contemporary series finds its roots in these works that are ingrained in our cultural memory. But with the stylistic sophistication, complex narrative structure, and believability of her characters and her fictional world, Rowling reveals that her narrative is also a continuation of the adult novelistic tradition. Consequently, I argue that she has advanced both categories by broadening their definitions and thus has altered the course of the novelistic genre.

As I have mentioned at various points throughout this dissertation, many if not all of the literary devices employed and refined by Rowling are also utilized and reworked by a growing number of her contemporaries. The novels written for children today are increasingly more complex, more experimental, and more uninhibited than perhaps ever

before. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, for instance, is a concurrent[576] and perhaps an equally significant example of "grown-up" children's literature. Pullman, like Rowling, pulls from a diverse range of literary traditions in order to add depth and integrity to his narrative. Interestingly, Pullman reworks the message of an ancient Biblical story for a common audience by reimagining a Renaissance masterpiece, Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Pullman's modern heroine, Lyra Belacqua Silvertongue, is the new Eve who chooses to fall from grace in order to liberate humanity from a passionless and fated universe. With his version of a "grown-up" narrative for children, Pullman gives his readers the talking bears and portals to otherworlds that are familiar to the children's literature tradition, but he also makes reference to Yeats's poetry, asks complicated ethical and theological questions (such as, for instance, what are the limits of free will?; where does moral authority lie if we exist in a deterministic universe centered around the notion of an omnipotent and omniscient God?) and probes so deeply into the mystery of human experience that we find ourselves contemplating its very particles.

Daniel Handler's (alias Lemony Snicket) *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, like Rowling's series, begins with deceptive simplicity that soon gives way to an intensely complicated and increasingly sophisticated work of mock-gothic or even absurdist fiction. Snicket, who is both narrator and character (and, indeed, perhaps the strangest character in this fictional world of outcasts, weirdoes, geniuses, and megalomaniacs) brings attention to the gap that exists between the public and private persona and the simultaneous significance and meaninglessness of secrets and their veracity or fallaciousness.   There is also an

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[576] The three volumes that comprise his series were published at nearly the same times as Rowling's novels, in the 1990s and early 2000s.

atmosphere of moral relativism that pervades the books as the Baudelaire children grow increasingly uncertain about the difference between right and wrong; they question—and inspire the reader to question—whether or not their own sometimes immoral methods can be justified if their goal is morally important enough. Additionally, like Rowling's spell language, the youngest Baudelaire child's "baby talk" often contains disguised meanings[577] that are only understood by her siblings, calling into question the assumption that children cannot understand the nuances of sophisticated language. There is also a frequent confusion of signs and signifiers when Snicket gives his child reader the definition of words he believes might be too sophisticated for a child reader to recognize or understand, humorously indicating the frequent and unnecessary condescension to children in adult speech.

Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy is a scathing critique of what happens when government cedes power to the selfish and abdicates its responsibility to its citizens. The story, told from the perspective of Katniss Everdeen, forced by her government to fight to the death in a yearly televised battle among the nation's youth, calls attention to the dangerous attractions of violence that exist in our contemporary Western reality. Katniss is one of the first modern female heroines who is not traditionally feminine in the way that she thinks or behaves, privileging survival above romance and stoicism above emotionality. Through Katniss and Peeta, the male protagonist (who, interestingly, embodies a more traditionally feminine identity, placing his love for Katniss above his own life and having an inclination towards beauty rather than violence), the novels also explore the ongoing

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[577] My personal favorite is "Busheney," which, Snicket tells us, means "you are a vile man who has no regard for anyone else," revealing that the word is a portmanteau for "Bush" and "Cheney."

consequences of personal trauma. The series ends with the bleak understanding that the so-called "heroes" must learn to live with their experiences and choices.

In *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making* and its sequels, Catherynne Valente constructs her protagonist September as well as her villainess the Marquess out of an amalgamation of other literary personae from mythology, legends, fairy tales, and other works of children's literature and adult literature (for example, Valente's female protagonist and antagonist alternately resemble Persephone, Wendy, Alice, Joan of Arc, Catherine Earnshaw, Marie Antoinette, Catherine de Medici, and Louis XIV) and her veritable *bricolage* of a Fairyland is also dazzling in its multifarious identity as Rossetti's Goblin Market, Peter Pan's Neverland, Alice's Wonderland, the mythological Underworld, Dante's Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso, and the battlefields of World War II. The fictional world that Valente has created is filled with anxiety—political, sexual, and psychological—and she allows her protagonist and her reader to question and challenge social norms. Valente's prose and poetry, exquisite in its detail and complexity and blended with postmodern techniques and feminist perspectives, is paradigm changing as her works are increasingly compared to adult novels and identified as speculative fiction rather than children's literature, though Valente herself prefers the term "mythpunk," which allows it to be both. In a 2011 interview for *Strange Horizons* with JoSelle Vanderhooft, Valente explains that she coined the term "mythpunk" as an alternate definition for the nebulous literary space in which her books seemed to find themselves because, for many readers and critics, they did not seem to fit into their prescribed category:

> But I like the use of the word punk. I like the potential for explosive, energetic work the word implies. The potential for revolt and revolution.

[…]

I've always considered the appending of –punk to whatever other word to indicate that X is not merely being explored or ruminated upon, but in some sense broke, harmed, and put back together again with safety pins and patches, a certain amount of anxiety, anger, and messy, difficult emotionality expressed in the direction of X. Additionally, I look for some of the aesthetic of punk—they may be three chords used by everyone, but if you shred them hard enough and scream loud enough they can become something new.

[…]

I don't think any one medium is better than any other, and more art, more beauty, more passion is always better than less.

I don't think anyone set out to blaze a trail. We all just looked around one day and realized how many of us were hanging out in the woods, and have started traveling together.[578]

In her explanation of "mythpunk," Valente touches on the problem that this dissertation set out to explore: there is a growing number of books for children that are effacing the traditional boundaries of their category. Valente calls a certain subsection of these fictions mythpunk while I call the wider emerging category "grown up" children's literature, but regardless of the term that defines these novels or the intention behind their creation, the idea that children's literature can be as serious, as complex, as sophisticated, and as beautiful as adult fiction is changing the future of the novel. Rowling, Pullman, Snicket, Collins, and Valente are joined in their liminal literary space by such other contemporary writers for children as Neil Gaiman, Kristin Cashore, Cornelia Funke, Diana Wynne Jones, Robin McKinley, and M.T. Anderson as well as by such writers for adults as Salman Rushdie, Donna Tartt, Jonathan Safran Foer, and Anthony Doerr, whose *All the Light We Cannot See*, like Tartt's *The Goldfinch* in 2014, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2015. Doerr's novel,

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[578] Valente, Catherynne, "Mythpunk: An Interview with Catherynne M. Valente," by Joselle Vanderhooft, *Strange Horizons,* (24 January 2011).

again like Tartt's, has also confused critics like Carmen Callil who wrote in her review of

the novel for *The Guardian* that *All the Light We Cannot See* "is such a page-turner, entirely

absorbing: one of those books in which the talent of the storyteller surmounts stylistic

inadequacies and ultimately defies one's better judgment."[579] Similar to Wood's criticism of

what he believed to be the childish quality of Tartt's prose and narrative, Callil views

Doerr's "embellished" and "operatic" prose as out of place in a novel for adults that is

otherwise character-oriented and obsessively attentive to detail. But in spite of this critique,

Callil also simultaneously marvels at the way Doerr "constructs an unusual edifice, made up

of fable and the prodigious inventions of the mechanical, technical, and natural world" and

she claims that Doerr's "energetic imagination seems steeped in the favourite books of

childhood." She writes, alluding to another children's story, "Much can be forgive a Pied

Piper like Doerr, who can pour his obsessive energies into a tale such as this." I would

argue, of course, that nothing must be forgiven. Instead I believe that Callil, like Wood, like

Bloom, and like James, proposes the wrong solution; works of literature like *All the Light*

We Cannot See, *The Goldfinch*, *Luka and the Fire of Life*, *The Graveyard Book*, *The Girl*

Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making, *His Dark Materials*, and

Harry Potter that incorporate the traditions of the children's book and the adult novel, that

defy categorization, and that, in so doing, broaden the boundaries of the novelistic genre, do

not require our forgiveness, but rather our celebration.

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[579] Carmen, Callil, "*All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr review – a story of morality, science, and Nazi occupation," *The Guardian* (17 May 2014).

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