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Beneath The Invisibility Cloak: Myth and The Modern World View in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*

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BENEATH THE INVISIBILITY CLOAK:

MYTH AND THE MODERN WORLD VIEW

IN J.K. ROWLING'S *HARRY POTTER*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Humanities

By

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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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       I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Mary Elizabeth Noren ENTITLED Beneath The Invisibility Cloak: Myth And The Modern World View In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Humanities.

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ABSTRACT

Noren, Mary Elizabeth. M.A., Department of Humanities, Wright State University, 2006. Beneath The Invisibility Cloak: Myth And The Modern World View In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*.

J.K. Rowling, best selling author of the Harry Potter series, uses mythology to add layers of meaning to her own creative storylines, to provide insight into the characters and plot, and to subtly foreshadow events to come. Rowling reinvents the old myths referred to in her text by creating surprise twists that are a reversal of the reader's expectations. Ultimately, Rowling's reworking of established mythology reveals the author's own modern perspective about what makes a hero, the power of choice, and the nature of evil.

Although Rowling draws from a variety of mythologies, including Arthurian legend, ancient Egyptian mythology and European folk lore, this thesis is focused largely upon her use of ancient Greek and Roman myths. The thesis examines Rowling's inclusion of mythic elements within the names of her characters, as well as within the characters themselves. The thesis further explores the role of myth within the storylines and overarching themes of the series. A historical survey of literary mythic motifs, such as werewolves, heroes, sirens and mermaids is included for comparison to Rowling's treatment of such characters. The author's use of myth to reflect contemporary concerns is explored, highlighting specific social and ethical issues that Rowling addresses.

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I. INTRODUCTION

J.K. Rowling, the author of the well-known series of *Harry Potter* books, draws heavily from mythology, legend and folklore, expressing modern ideas and social morals to the newest generation of readers. She reinvents the old myths through a pattern of surprise twists and a reversal of expectations that ultimately reveal the author's own perspective and contemporary ethos.

The term myth has broad applicability. In its simplest definition, a myth is a story with traditional roots that uses symbols and imagery to express ideas, mysteries and truth. Although today's western cultures do not interpret myths literally, they are still believed to hold real meaning metaphorically, morally and symbolically.

Eric Csapo, a scholar and mythologist, suggests that myth conveys social ideology in narrative form:

> Myth is one of the most important media for ideological work. Most ancient myths survive because they operate at the highest ideological level: they participate in the creation of a unifying general ideology. [1]

Rowling's work is enriched by mythology and unified by a basic ideology. Throughout the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling explores philosophical and sociological ideas. Many of the names, plots and characters are rooted within the mythological tradition, drawing on the stories of ancient mythology. Rowling's stories reveal a belief that the abuse of power is one of the most common and reprehensible forms of corruption. Her treatment of various characters and plotlines depicts a belief that Good and Evil exist as choices within every person. Rowling portrays modern social ills, such as discrimination, through

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[1] Eric Csapo, <u>Theories of Mythology</u> (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) 301.

her transformations of mythic characters like Hagrid, the motherly giant and Remus Lupin, the gentle werewolf. The series expresses further such philosophical ideas and social morals through the references and imagery of the old myths within it. Although an understanding of the mythological roots of Rowling's work is not expected or required of the average reader, a closer look at them does offer an interesting view of their role in the series. A comparison of the ancient sources to Rowling's use of them provides an effective lens through which to view the series.

Wendy Doniger points out, "Myths survive for centuries, in a succession of incarnations, both because they are available and because they are intrinsically charismatic. Rowling is a wizard herself at the magic art of bricolage: new stories crafted out of recycled pieces of old stories."[2] There is no question that Rowling was heavily influenced by the world's great stories. She says that her earliest memories are of her parents reading the classics and fairytales to her; something they did almost constantly in her early years. As she grew older, Rowling began to read and write. She loved stories and continued reading and writing voraciously into her young adulthood. She then studied Classical literature and languages at Exeter University in England.[3] Rowling consciously incorporates history, French and Latin into her writing. She humorously noted this in 2000 when she gave a speech at her alma mater, saying, "I'm one of the very few who has ever found a practical application for their classics degree."[4]

The evidence of these Classical literary influences is present throughout the

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[2] Gary Weiner, ed., Readings On J.K. Rowling (San Diego: Greenhaven, 2003) 95. The article was first published under the title, "Spot the Source: Harry Potter Explained" www.books.guardian.CO.UK, Feb. 10, 2000. Copyrighted by London Review of Books, Ltd. The essay was reprinted in Weiner's collection.
[3] Marc Shapiro, J.K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter (New York: St. Martin's Griffon, 2004) 20,43.
[4] Oct. 2000 CBC interview www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/educ.htm

fantasy world she has created in her books about Harry Potter, a seemingly ordinary boy who discovers at the age of eleven that he is the child of wizards and is eligible to attend a boarding school called Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which lies hidden somewhere in the magical heart of England. Throughout the text Rowling draws heavily from the mythology of Classical antiquity.

She also infuses Latin and French, the two languages she studied at Exeter, throughout the stories. Proper names and magical spells are often the result of Rowling's playful use of both Latin and French vocabularies. Draco Malfoy, for example, is aptly named. His first name is Latin for serpent. As a member of Slytherin House, whose emblem is a snake, Draco's name is fitting. It also works to suggest his dark side, as snakes have long been associated with death, danger and evil. Draco's last name is equally appropriate, as *mal foy* means bad faith in French. Draco and the entire Malfoy family have put their faith in the Dark Arts (unethical magical practices) which Harry views as a bad choice. The influences of Rowling's Classical and language studies become effective literary devices in her hands.

J.K. Rowling's work has drawn a great deal of scholarly and less-than-scholarly attention from writers of all kinds. This is not surprising, since all six published books of the projected seven book series, have been best sellers.[5] Four have been released as wildly successful major motion picture films and the rest are destined to follow the same path. The popularity of these books is often described in such terms as *phenomenon*, *frenzy*, *sensation*, and *Pottermania*. Many have been quick to attribute this success to the massive marketing and commercialization of the series. Dustin Kidd believes the Harry

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[5] At the time of this writing, the seventh book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* had not yet been released for publication. The expected release date is July 2007.

Potter series "is popular precisely for its fame and the breadth of its audience, rather than for any civic ideals or folk qualities."[6] Certainly, the fact that *Harry Potter* has become a household name in many parts of the world has directly influenced some to read the books who would not have done so otherwise. Kidd's article makes the point that consumer consumption directly affected by popular culture is not necessarily a bad thing. He explains that people who have elements of popular culture in common, such as the experience of reading the *Harry Potter* series, have feelings of "shared sentiment" that "produce social cohesion by bonding members of society together in relationships of trust and shared purpose."[7] If this is true, what is it about the experience that creates this sense of shared sentiment? It must be more than the fact that all parties have read the book or that they all liked it. Millions of people eat hot dogs every year, but do not create fan clubs, films, and Web sites around them. It is illuminating then, to delve deeper to discern what aspects of the series itself are so appealing. Advertisements and other marketing ploys may initially capture a nine-year-old boy's attention and influence him to purchase a book, but will they inspire him to pour through seven hundred pages not once, but several times? Perhaps the content, the themes, the fantasy and the characters are more significant than Kidd acknowledges.

As Andrew Blake reminds us, "using hype to explain the phenomenon is much too easy. It does <u>not</u> explain how a book for children that was first published in a print run of 500 by a smallish UK 'quality' publisher without any hype at all comes to the world's attention in the first place, nor why that book, and the subsequent series, is so

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[6] Dustin Kidd, "Harry Potter and the Functions of Popular Culture," <u>The Journal of Popular Culture</u> 40 (2007) 69-87, 72. Kidd does not offer this analysis as a criticism. In fact, his article is devoted to exploring the often over-looked role of popular culture as generating both social cohesion and individual identity.
[7] Kidd 78.

appealing to adults. And it doesn't even begin to explain why a series of fantasy stories about a young wizard's education becomes globally appealing during the turn of the millennium."[8] This is a valid point, for the first 500 books sold largely by word-of-mouth recommendations from parents and children. Why did these early readers of the series enjoy it and find it worthy of recommendation? This question has many valid answers, but one that directly relates to the topic of this thesis is that it speaks (imaginatively and mythically) to the attitudes and beliefs of contemporary readers.

Although Rowling's popularity, whatever its causes, has inspired many writers to examine her work, none have addressed (in depth) the role of mythology within her work. The majority of scholarly work on the writings of Rowling consist of essays on other aspects of her work. Lana A. Whited, Gary Wiener and Elizabeth E. Heilman edited collections of such essays.[9] Some of these essays are written from a cultural studies perspective. Others are written as reader response criticism, in which the essay writer, as a reader, interjects her own take on the series, based solely on her own frame of reference, such as Hollie Anderson's essay *Reading Harry Potter with Navajo Eyes*.[10] As the title implies, Anderson writes about what *Harry Potter* reveals when viewed through a Navajo lens. Other works explore Rowling's writing from an educational perspective. In their essay *Young Adult Literature: A Boy's Alternative To Bodice Rippers. Harry Potter Update: Is It For Y.A.?* Katherine T. Bucher and M. Lee Manning describe how *Harry Potter* is a fantasy series that is appropriate for all ages but is especially appealing

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[8] Andrew Blake, <u>The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter</u> (London: Verso, 2002) 3.
[9] Lana A. Whited, ed., <u>The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter</u> (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), Gary Wiener, ed., <u>Readings on J.K. Rowling</u> (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2003), Elizabeth E. Heilman, ed., <u>Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives</u> (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2003).
[10] Heilman, 97-107.

to adolescent boys.[11]

Countless educators have considered whether *Harry Potter* is a useful or beneficial classroom tool for a wide range of subjects, including reading practice, history studies, science projects and applied ethics. In her article, *Quidditch Quizzes and Beastly Books: Using Harry Potter to Teach Primary and Secondary Sources*, Lynne Farrel Stover explains how teachers can tap into Harry Potter's popularity in order to inspire learning within the classroom.[12] Not all of these educationally minded essays are complimentary. Harold Bloom attacks Rowling's prose, her readers and her academic fans in his article, "Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be Wrong? Yes." In it, Bloom suggests that there is no more educational value to Rowling than there is to Stephen King.[13]

Literary perspectives abound, too. Many view the plot of the Harry Potter books as the perfect example of Joseph Campbell's well-known mythic plot pattern, the Hero's Journey. Lynne Milum details exactly how Harry Potter completes each phase of Campbell's journey in her essay *Hero's Journey—Cycle of The Monomyth*.[14] Mary Pharr also notes Harry Potter's potential for representing Campbell's monomyth in her essay, "Harry Potter as Hero-in-Progress."[15] Other writers view Rowling's work as a continuation of the once-popular boarding school stories.[16] Maria Nikolajeva believes that *Harry Potter's* success is due to the fact that the series is a mix of many popular genres. She describes how his story has much in common with mythical and folktale

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[11] Katherine T. Bucher and M. Lee Mannig, "Young Adult Literature: A Boy's Alternative To Bodice Rippers. Harry Potter Update: Is it for Y.A.?" The English Journal 89 No.4 (Mar. 2000): 135-138.
[12] Lynne Farrel Stover, "Quidditch Quizzes and Beastly Books: Using Harry Potter To Teach Primary and Secondary Sources," School Library Media Activities Monthly 20 No.2 (Oct. 2005): 22-24.
[13] Harold Bloom, "Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be wrong? Yes." Wall Street Journal, July 11, 2000, A26.
[14] Lynne Millum, Hero's Journey—Cycle of the Monomyth, Jan. 2006
http://www.cycleofthemonomyth.html
[15] Whited, 53-66.
[16] Nicholas Tucker. "The Rise and Rise of Harry Potter," Children's Literature in Education 30 (1999) 221-234.

motifs, but explains that he is presented as more of a Romantic hero than anything else.[17]

Less scholarly works exist in the thousands. These often take a deeply religious viewpoint, either in favor of or opposed to the *Harry Potter* series. Some writers passionately denounce Harry and his magical studies as the work of Satanic sorcery. Eric Barger and David Benoit propose that the popularity of books that feature sorcery signals the coming of the end of the world. They base this theory on their interpretation of the biblical Book of Revelation and discuss the issue in their own book, *Entertaining Spirits Unaware: The End-Time Occult Invasion*.[18] Equally adamant and numerous are religious opinions that Harry Potter is a modern embodiment of Christian morals. Reverend Don Peter Fleetwood made news when he spoke out in favor of the Harry Potter series at a Vatican press conference. He expressed his belief that Rowling's intention is to help children discriminate between good and evil.[19]

There are writers who focus exclusively on the topic of myth and in so doing, include discussions of Harry Potter. Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara explore how myth and fantasy offer profound insight into truth. They point out that modern fantasy literature is "steeped and rooted in ancient myth, medieval heroic legend, and fairytale."[20] This is certainly true in the case of the *Harry Potter* series. No one, however, seems to explore exactly how Rowling uses mythology in her books as a literary device or as a window into a larger ethos. Some writers do look for larger themes in Rowling's work. In identifying the presence of themes like death, they have touched on the fact that

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[17] Heilman 125-140.

[18] Eric Barger and David Benoit, <u>Entertaining Spirits Unaware: The End-Time Occult Invasion</u> (Oklahoma City: Hearthstone, 2001) Part Two, 1.

[19] "Vatican Gives Thumbs Up to Harry Potter's Good vs. Evil Morals," <u>USA Today</u> Feb.2, 2003: http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2003-02-03-potter-vatican_x.htm

[20] Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara, <u>From Homer to Harry Potter</u> (Grand Rapids: Brazo Press, 2006) 16.

Rowling's own experiences may be influencing the text. There have been a handful of unauthorized biographies that generally suggest that Rowling's treatment of death was inspired by the death of her own mother. In interviews, Rowling has acknowledged the effects of her mother's death upon her writing. The first book begins with the death of Harry's parents. Rowling's mother died during her earliest drafts of the story. The *Chicago Tribune* carried a story about this and quoted Rowling as saying, "My books are largely about death. They open with the death of Harry's parents. We're all frightened of it…[I was] alternately a wreck and then in total denial [when my mother died]."[21] Clearly, some writers have suggested that Rowling's own viewpoint emerges from the text. However, none connects the role of traditional mythology to articulating a contemporary philosophical or sociological perspective within the series.

David Colbert and Allan and Elizabeth Kronzck come the closest to addressing the importance of myth in Rowling's work. They have researched numerous mythical references from the series and identify their sources in books that read like dictionaries of mythology.[22] Essentially, their books boil down to an entertaining and informational kind of name-that-myth resource in which they briefly and generally identify some of the mythological and historical references in the series. The topic is treated in an introductory manner and no larger thesis as to the meaning of the myths' inclusion in the series is explored. While these books are useful for identifying many of Rowling's mythological resources, they attempt no further interpretation. For example, both Colbert and the Kronzcks include the phoenix in their books. In Rowling's series, Professor

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[21] "Of Death and Inspiration," <u>Chicago Tribune</u> Jan. 11, 2006: B1.
[22] Other similar sourcebooks exist, such as Geroge Beahm's <u>Fact, Fiction, and Folklore in Harry Potter's World: An Unofficial Guide.</u> This book helps readers to locate basic information about people, places and things in Harry Potter's world.

Dumbledore has a pet phoenix named Fawkes. The writers of the reference books identify the phoenix as a magical bird that exists in Greek, Egyptian and Chinese mythology. They mention the phoenix's many associations with the sun's cycles and later, in the Middle Ages, its association with resurrection. They also mention the popularity of the phoenix as an alchemists' symbol. None of these authors, however, connects Rowling's use of the phoenix to any larger idea. The phoenix, in fact, may symbolize the deaths and rebirths of characters and generations within the Harry Potter series. They are content simply to identify some of the more obvious mythical references within the series and offer no critical comment about Rowling's use of these sources, nor do they quote primary sources directly. Instead, they offer a dictionary of some of the mythical, historical and legendary references that appear within Rowling's work. Although accurate and engaging, these Rowling myth dictionaries are simply designed to inform young or uneducated fans about the origins of the stories' details, such as which cultures first gave us wands, unicorns, and three-headed dogs.

A sample entry from one of these Harry Potter handbooks best illustrates the way these writers approach the subject of mythology within the Harry Potter books. In *The Hidden Myths in Harry Potter,* David Colbert provides brief, informative paragraphs about a select few of the mythological references that appear in the Harry Potter series. Take for example, his section about merrows:

> These merpeople of Ireland are described as 'less beautiful' than the selkies of Scotland, a description Harry has crossed out and replaced with 'ugly'. The merpeople he saw beneath Hogwarts lake in *Harry Potter And The Goblet of Fire* would explain his harsh comment: they have 'greyish' skin and 'wild, dark, green hair'. That is close to legend, especially in the case of merrow men. However in legend merrow women are sometimes said to be beautiful. Also according to legend, a magical cap allows merrows to take human form and live on land. If it

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is broken or stolen, they cannot return to sea.[23]

That is the full extent of Colbert's discussion of merrows. He does not cite the legends he refers to, nor, more importantly, does he speculate as to the role the merpeople play in Rowling's story.

This thesis seeks to build upon the work of Colbert and the Kronzcks. It traces the history of mythical aspects of the series, examining the way Rowling's use of myth allows her to offer social and moral commentary. For example, this thesis' discussion of merpeople cites Classical sources for similar mythical creatures associated with water and compares them to Rowling's merrows. The comparison is achieved through examination of ancient texts juxtaposed against Rowling's text and imagery. The literary history of these creatures is also discussed. The section closes with an exploration of the significance of these creatures in antiquity as well as in Rowling's plot. Just as the sirens of antiquity can be seen to represent danger to sailors, Rowling's merpeople represent danger to the tournament competitors who attempt an underwater task, as well as dangers to come in the series itself. In this way, the Black Lake's dark, murky waters may be a metaphor for the perilous uncertainty of the future for the students of Hogwarts. Ultimately, it may also a metaphor for the feelings and moods of adolescence itself.

This thesis explores some of the references to mythology, particularly Classical myth, that are found within the Harry Potter books. Further, the thesis identifies some of the Classical literary sources for these myths, such as Homer and Ovid, and compares them to the way they are used in the Harry Potter texts. In addition to establishing the existence of these mythological connections, the thesis examines J.K. Rowling's use of these myths as both literary devices and ethical commentary. The end result is a more

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[23] David Colbert, The Hidden Myths In Harry Potter (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004) 10.

thorough exploration of the role mythology plays in Rowling's work and an

understanding of the emergent worldview that results.

II. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Rowling acknowledges the substantial role Classical mythology, history and language have played in her series of books. She uses these elements in a variety of ways, infusing them into the names and natures of the characters themselves. She draws her inspiration from a broad range of literary and historical sources, and she chooses them very carefully. Sometimes, when no other pre-existing name will do, Rowling invents her own. In a 1999 radio interview, Rowling said, "I'm big on names. I like names, generally…some of them are invented…but I also collect them from all kinds of places, maps, street names, names of people I meet, books on saints."[24] She also describes naming as being "crucial" to her, saying, "some of my characters have had eight or nine names before I hit the right one. And for some reason, I just can't move on until I know I've called the right thing. That's very fundamental to me." [25] She also notes the influence of folklore and literature on her choice of names. [26] In the article "The Fascinating Language of Harry Potter," Jessy Randall explores the meaning and origins of Rowling's distinct vocabulary, including the words she invented for the series. Randall explains how many of Rowling's words and names come from languages, mythology and poetry. Randall also notes that names are often clues as to what readers should expect from characters.[27] This is apparent when considering the major characters.

The most prominent villain of the series, Voldemort, can trace his name to the

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[24] http://www.quick-quote-quill.org/articles/1999/1099-connectiontransc.html
[25] 1999 WBUR interview http://www.madamscoop.org/themes/names.htm
[26] ITV 2005 interview http://www.madamscoop.org
[27] Wiener, 52-62.

French phrase meaning "flight of death." This is the perfect name for a character who has devoted his life to the pursuit of immortality. As revealed in the series, his birth name, Tom Marvolo Riddle, is an anagram that states, "I am Lord Voldemort." Although everyone seems to acknowledge that Rowling chooses interesting names, and some of the historical sources of the names have even been identified, there has been little exploration of the role the names play in the text – i.e., their deeper significance. Through the careful selection of names alone, Rowling accomplishes multiple literary objectives within her writing.

The name of a Rowling character can draw upon specific myths that provide the character with a kind of history, imbue the character with significant character traits, and relate to the character's role in the stories. Rowling often alters some aspect of these mythological references, twisting them into something unexpected. A closer look at these changes often reveals how they support the larger ideas that are at work in the text.

Assigning mythic names to characters is a clever writing device too, for it allows Rowling to link her characters to mythological characters of the same name. Ultimately, such connections imply something about the nature of the characters. Argus Filch, the grumpy watchman of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, is a good example of this.[28]

In Greek myth, Argus is the name of another watchman who was covered in eyes. He was chosen by the goddess Hera to guard Io, a young girl whom Hera had transformed into a cow out of jealousy. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* Io describes her terrifying guardian:

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[28] Filch is a slang term referring to stealing objects of little importance, which implies the character's petty nature.

I'm frightened when I see the shape of Argos,
Argos the herdsman with ten thousand eyes.
He stalks me with his crafty eyes: he died,
But the earth didn't hide him; still he comes
even from the depths of the underworld to hunt me:
he drives me starving by the sands of the sea.[29]

Ovid tells us that it was nearly impossible for anyone to get past him unnoticed as

he never closed all of his eyes at once. Even when he slept, some eyes were ever

watchful:

…Argus
Who had a hundred eyes; two at a time,
No more than two would ever close in slumber,
The rest kept watch. No matter how he stood,
Which way he turned, he always looked at Io,
Always had Io in sight.[30]

Apollodorus, the writer who compiled a comprehensive guide to Greek

mythology during the first or second century AD, does not specifically describe Argus

the watchman's many eyes, but he calls him "Argos the All-Seeing" in reference to the

well known trait.[31] Zeus, smitten with Io, sent clever Hermes to rescue her. Eventually,

Hermes managed to bore Argus so thoroughly with long, drawn-out stories, that all of his

eyes closed in sleep. Hermes then killed him.

Naming the Hogwarts watchman after this formidable watchman of Greek

mythology is humorously misleading. Rowling's Argus, who is called Filch by the

students, certainly *tries* to be ever watchful and all seeing. He is overzealous in his

mean-spirited attempts to catch students violating curfew or breaking any other school

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[29] Aeschylus, <u>Prometheus Bound</u> Trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 569-574.
[30] Ovid, <u>Metamorphoses</u> Trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983) vs. 629-634.
[31] Apollodorus, <u>The Library of Greek Mythology</u> Trans. Robin Hard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 2.1.3 p.59.

rules. It eventually becomes apparent that he is a virtually useless watchman. Like his Greek counterpart, he too has more than two eyes at his disposal, yet they are not his own, but those of his cat, Mrs. Norris, with whom he shares a special connection. She prowls the halls of Hogwarts, and whenever she spots something awry, Filch is quickly alerted. Even with this extra pair of eyes to his advantage, Argus Filch manages to misconstrue almost everything he or his cat sees. When he happens upon Harry who has just discovered a stiff, immobile Mrs. Norris suspended from the hallway ceiling, he immediately arrives at a faulty conclusion and accuses Harry of killing her.[32] Argus Filch is wrong in both respects, as the cat is not dead, but petrified, and Harry is not at all responsible. It seems that all the eyes in the world could not improve this bumbling watchman's poor judgment. He often manages to misinterpret the information his many eyes perceive.

In a later book, Hogwarts is temporarily overtaken by the cruel and stupid High Inquisitor, Delores Umbridge. Under her rule, the students are in danger, teachers and staff are leaving, and new rules appear almost daily that strip the students of their rights. She enforces these rules with cruel, physical punishment. Argus Filch seems to be the only person at Hogwarts who doesn't despise the High Inquisitor, and he foolishly states that she is the best thing to ever happen to the school. In typical Rowling style, Argus Filch becomes an ironic figure who, like the Greek Argus, is a determined watchman with many eyes, yet unlike the Greek Argus, who was an effective guardian until he met Hermes, Argus Filch is a wholly ineffective watchman who is essentially blind to the happenings around him in spite of his extra eyes.

Professor Sybill Trelawney provides another good example of the way Rowling

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[32] J.K. Rowling, <u>Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets</u> (New York: Scholastic, 1999) 140.

uses names to allude to ancient myths. Professor Trelawney teaches Divination at

Hogwarts. She wears extraordinarily thick eyeglasses and frequently bumps into things.

In this way, she seems to offer a play on the ancient Greek figure of Tiresias, the blind

seer. Although blind, Tiresias could see into the future and made accurate, often horrible,

predictions based on his visions. Professor Trelawney regularly makes very gloomy

predictions, too, but only two, neither of which she can recall making, seem to be true.

The rest of her days are spent trying in vain to see into the future via playing cards, tea

leaves, and crystal balls. Many of her colleagues and students think she is a complete

fraud. Her blindness is partially physical, as she indeed requires strong corrective lenses,

but chiefly she is blind to her own ineptitude.

The character's first name, Sybill, refers to the prophetesses of Roman myth, the

Sibyls.[33] The importation of the Sibyl and the books of Sibylline prophecy into Roman

culture may actually be the result of Greek influence, but their precise origins are

unknown.[34] Like Professor Trelawney, they often made predictions of doom and

disaster. Few collections of Sibylline Oracles have survived from antiquity,[35] but they

clearly contained many "predictions of woe for cities and peoples."[36] Pliny tells of one

such prophecy that was discovered just before the Civil War during the Ciceronian Age,

predicting devastating carnage.[37] After the battle of Actium, Augustus had more than

two thousand books of prophecy burned, keeping those that remained in the recently built

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[33] Although Sybill is spelled slightly differently than Sibyl, the names are phonetically identical.
[34] Cornelia C. Coulter, "The Transfiguration of the Sibyl" The Classical Journal 46 No.3 (Dec. 1950): 121-126. 121.
[35] Coulter, Cornelia C. "The Transfiguration of the Sibyl." The Classical Journal 46 No.3 (Dec. 1950): 121-126. "In the year 83 B.C. the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill was destroyed by fire, and with it the oracles of the Sibyl." 122.
[36] Price 508.
[37] Pliny, *N.H.*, 17.25 (38) 243.

temple of Apollo located on the Palatine Hill.[38] While the Roman people may have

become somewhat cynical about the Sibylline Oracles by that time, due to their repeated

misuse for political reasons,[39] the poets of the Augustan Age, such as Vergil and Horace,

base their portrayal of the Sibyl upon earlier tradition.[40]

There were dozens of Sibyls, or prophetesses, in the ancient world. Perhaps the

most famous of these is the Sibyl of Cumae, of Virgil's poem *The Aeneid,* whom Aeneas

visited in her cave to learn the future:

> And when thou drawest near to Cumae town,
> The mystic pools, Avernus' murmuring grove,
> There shalt thou see the Prophetess inspired,
> Who sings the fates of men and writes on leaves.
> Whate'er she writes, on leaves she sorteth well...[41]

The Sibyl of Cumae guided Aeneas to the underworld and back. Virgil describes

her as spewing forth prophecy in an ecstatic trance divinely inspired by Apollo:

> And suddenly her face, her colour changed,
> Her locks disordered, fell, her bosom gasped,
> Her wild heart swelled, her stature grew, her voice
> Seemed more than human, as the God, drawn near,
> Breathed influence…[42]

Professor Trelawney usually makes her own predictions but has twice uttered

prophecy in a trance of forgetfulness and in a voice not her own. The twist is that while

the ancient Sibyl's predictions were accurate, Professor Trelawney is almost always

wrong — with two exceptions. Although Professor Trelawney does not enjoy the

reputation or the accuracy of the Roman Sibyls, one of her prophecies sets the course of

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[38] Coulter, 123.

[39] Coulter, 121. "…the report of prodigies and the consequent necessity of consulting the Sibylline Books were being used as a kind of 'racket' to delay the departure of the consuls for their provinces."

[40] Coulter, 123. Coulter reminds us that Vergil's Sibyl is even more significant and dignified than the "oracles quoted from Sibylline Books in Republican Rome."

[41] Vergil, Aeneid Trans. Charles J. Billson (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1995) Book III.

[42] Vergil VII.

action for Harry's life and ultimately influences the fate of everyone in his world.

Rowling's Sybill also favors prophecies of doom, even when spoken in a trance-like state:

> Her eyes started to roll. Harry sat there in a panic. She looked as though she was about to have some sort of seizure. He hesitated; thinking of running to the hospital wing—and then Professor Trelawney spoke again in the same harsh voice quite unlike her own:
> "THE DARK LORD LIES ALONE AND FRIENDLESS, ABANDONED BY HIS FOLLOWERS. HIS SERVANT HAS BEEN CHAINED THESE TWELVE YEARS. TONIGHT, BEFORE MIDNIGHT…THE SERVANT WILL BREAK FREE AND SET OUT TO REJOIN HIS MASTER. THE DARK LORD WILL RISE AGAIN WITH HIS SERVANT'S AID, GREATER AND MORE TERRIBLE THAN EVER HE WAS. TONIGHT…BEFORE MIDNIGHT…THE SERVANT…WILL SET OUT…TO REJOIN…HIS MASTER…" [43]

In addition to frenzied prophecy, Sybill Trelawney is also associated with a cave-like setting, which is reminiscent of Virgil's Sibyl. She dwells in the dark tower space of Hogwarts castle, where she holds all of her classes. In fact, she rarely leaves this dim, cavernous place.

Rowling's Professor Trelawney is the descendant of Cassandra Trelawney, a famous and gifted seer. This name is yet another allusion to Classical mythology. Cassandra was a seer of Greek myth. Homer first tells of Cassandra but does not specifically mention her prophetic powers.[44] In his play, *Agamemnon,* Aeschylus refers to the myth of Cassandra and Apollo, explaining how she received her clairvoyance as a gift from the god in exchange for her promise of love.[45] Once Cassandra became clairvoyant, however, she chose to break her promise. The gods cannot take back blessings once they

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[43] Rowling, <u>Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban</u> (NY: Scholastic, 1999) 524.
[44] Homer, <u>Iliad</u> Trans. Ennis Rees (NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 2005) 13.416, 24.805 and
 <u>Odyssey</u> Trans. Richard Lattimore (NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 2005) 4.502.
[45] Kovacs, David. "The Way of a God With a Maid in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon.*" <u>Classical Philology</u> 82 No.4 (Oct. 1987) 326-334. This explores the debate about whether Cassandra and Apollo were ever mythical lovers and concludes that it is likely and that she consented to bear him children and to be devoted to him, but broke her promise. 333.

are given, so instead, Apollo punished Cassandra by proclaiming that no one would ever believe her predictions.[46] Cassandra told the Trojans that the Greeks were hiding within the Trojan horse, but they ignored her. [47]

In naming Professor Trelawney's ancestor Cassandra, Rowling suggests stories and back-stories with significant family histories. It would seem that the family name of Cassandra (and its mythical associations) creates a kind of inherited curse. Trelawney inherits the gift of prophecy from her ancestor, Cassandra. She also seems to have inherited the curse of disbelief from the mythic Cassandra. Rowling's connection of Trelawney to the mythic Cassandra helps to explain Professor Trelawney's poor reputation as well as her occasionally powerful accuracy, for she, like the mythic Cassandra, is rarely believed. Aeschylus portrays Cassandra as a tragic, sympathetic character by emphasizing her cursed existence. As Seth L. Schein points out, the Cassandra scene in *Agamemnon* is a "mad-scene" in which Cassandra is understandably tormented by simultaneous visions of the past, present and future. Apollo has possessed her and enabled her to see clearly her own impending murder.[48] In addition to the horror of envisioning gruesome events of the past, present and future, Cassandra is powerless to stop the visions or the occurrence of the future events they reveal. Further contributing to Cassandra's suffering in the play is the refusal of any of the characters (including the Chorus) to believe her.[49]

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[46] Aeschylus, <u>The Oresteia</u>, *Agamemnon*. Trans. Douglas Young. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974. 3:555.

[47] Apollodorus 157.

[48] Schein, Seth L. "The Cassandra Scene in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*." <u>Greece and Rome</u> 29 No.1 (Apr. 1982): 11-16. "In thus witnessing her own death, she transcends a boundary of experience which was, for the Greeks, one of the defining limits of the human condition." 11-12.

[49] J.H. Quincey. "Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 1242-5." <u>The Classical Review</u> 13 No.2 (Jun. 1963): 127-128. Quincey's article is concerned with these four lines of the Chorus-Cassandra scene. He explores the chorus' role in the play and their consistent refusal to accept Cassandra's prophecies. "…it is the essential pathos of

The notion of families plagued by recurring themes and troubles also has its roots in mythology. One need not look any further than The House of Atreus to understand this. Cassandra repeatedly calls attention to the family of Atreus and Thyestes. Schein points out that Cassandra's "emphasis on the Furies and her verbal echoes of earlier passages in the play, links divinity (both Chthonic and Olympian) with several generations of human actions, which cannot any longer be seen as random."[50] Here, Schein refers to Cassandra's belief that the current suffering of the House of Atreus is essentially inherited. The wrath of the Furies had been incurred from several generations of wrongdoing. Rowling's use of the mythological motif of cursed families allows her to illuminate the significance of how one's personal history affects not only one's descendents but society, too. Rowling's treatment of Sybill Trelawney emphasizes further the importance and power of the choices people make. The theme that good and evil are choices, not destiny, is discussed in more detail in Chapter IV of this thesis.

J. Wilma Counts describes Cassandra's role in Aeschylus' play, saying, "she symbolizes and chronicles past and future events for the audience as well as for the chorus; she describes off-stage actions of the present; and she reinforces the underlying tone and mood of the play."[51] Rowling's descendent of Cassandra, Sybill Trelawney, could be viewed as serving a similar literary function.

The character of Sirius Black is first introduced in the third book of the series, *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*. In this novel, the wizarding world is in a fearful panic because its most dangerous criminal, Sirius Black, has miraculously (and

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Cassandra's situation that she cannot convince the Chorus until she has entered the palace to be butchered with Agamemnon." 128.

[50] Schein, 15.

[51] Counts, J. Wilma. "Cassandra: An Approach to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon.*" The English Journal 62 No.1 (Jan. 1973): 33-36. p.33.

mysteriously) escaped from Azkaban, a high security prison previously thought to be escape-proof. Sirius Black had been imprisoned for the murder of a former friend and several innocent bystanders. He is believed to be a Death Eater or follower of the Dark Lord. By all accounts Sirius is a violent, vicious madman.

Black's first name, Sirius, is the name of the brightest star in the Canis Major (Great Dog) constellation. It is commonly referred to as the "Dog Star," and it is ten times brighter than the sun. The ancient Egyptians and the Greeks believed this star to be a god. The constellation symbolized the dog, who was the loyal companion of Orion, the hunter, who also has his own neighboring constellation.[52] This makes Sirius an appropriate name for Rowling's character because he is an *animagus*, a wizard who can change himself into an animal. Sirius transforms into a great, black dog, which is how he managed his prison escape. At first glance it would seem that Rowling's naming of this character after the Dog Star is a reference to his special ability to become a black dog. However, as is so often the case with Rowling, there is much more to it than that.

In the ancient world dogs were often considered vicious, lowly animals. To be called a dog in the ancient world was an insult.[53] Packs of dogs roamed the countryside and posed a great danger to travelers. The god Hermes was associated with the protection of such travelers. Among his many titles he was called *Hermes Argeïfhonts*, meaning *slayer of dogs*. Odysseus faced this danger in the *Odyssey* when he approached the dwelling of Eumaios:

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[52] Hyginus, <u>Astronomica</u> Trans. Basel (NY: Garland Pub. 1976) 2.34-2.36. There are only fragments of the various Orion and Sirius stories that remain in written form. The story of how Diana (Artemis) was tricked by Apollo into shooting Orion with an arrow was preserved by Hyginus in the second century. He tells how Diana, in her sorrow, set Orion in the sky among the constellations. It is said that his faithful dog, Sirius, endlessly sought his master and so was placed in the sky near him.
[53] Homer, <u>Iliad</u> 261-262. An enraged Achilles calls the son of Atreus a "drunken sot with the greedy eyes of a dog."

> Suddenly the wild baying dogs caught sight of Odysseus.
> They ran at him with a great outcry, and Odysseus prudently
> Sat down on the ground, and the staff fell out of his hand. But there,
> Beside his own steading,he might have endured a shameful mauling.[54]

J.B. Hainsworth tells us that Odysseus "met with a hazard familiar to many…travelers."[55]

Throughout most of *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban,* Sirius Black appears to

be just such a villain, as vicious and dangerous as the wild dogs feared by travelers

throughout the countryside of antiquity. Sirius had been a student at Hogwarts and

Harry's father's best friend. He was even named Harry's godfather at his birth. When

Harry was a baby, Voldemort and the Death Eaters were very powerful. They killed

anyone who opposed them. Harry's parents went into hiding. Voldemort discovered

their location and killed them both as they tried to protect Harry. It was assumed that

only Sirius Black would have known their location; therefore, it became apparent to

everyone that it was Sirius who had revealed their whereabouts, thus betraying them to

their death.

In creating the character of Sirius, it is clear that Rowling was inspired by the

Classical associations which are obvious in his name and the Dog Star connection.

Often, however, Rowling utilizes multiple myths and legends to inspire her characters.

These sources work together to create a full, rich depiction. Drawing on a post-Classical

tradition, Rowling further emphasizes the negative aspects of Sirius' image, particularly

in dog form, by introducing the European folkloric images of the black dog as an omen of

death. Professor Trelawney refers to this ominous dog as *The Grim*, which is one of its

many legendary names in folklore. In Divination class Professor Trelawney examines

the pattern of dregs in Harry's tea cup and she is alarmed when she sees the shape of a

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[54] Homer XIV.29-32.
[55] J.B. Hainsworth, "Odysseus And The Dogs," <u>Greece and Rome </u>8 No.2 (Oct.1961) 122-125.

black dog. When she tells Harry that he has The Grim, he is baffled:

> "The Grim my dear, The Grim!" cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked that Harry hadn't understood. "The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen--- the worst omen --- of *death*!"[56]

In Greece and in Britain it was thought that black dogs accompanied Hecate, the Greek goddess of sorcery, as she roamed the countryside. She was believed to be invisible, so sightings of black dogs were frightening.[57] There are many versions of the legendary Grim, and it is called by a host of different names, each unique to the region in which the particular variation originates. In southern and eastern English counties, as well as Scotland, stories abound of a terrifying spirit called the Black Dog. In these stories, Black Dogs haunt ancient roads, crossroads, railroad tracks and bridges. They can inflict serious wounds or even death. It is widely believed that to see a Black Dog is to bring death.[58] In Yorkshire, the Black Dog is called the Church Grim. Only a minister of the church can see the Church Grim and escape its "usual portent of death."[59] In northern England, the dangerous Black Dog is called Padfoot, which happens significantly, to be the nickname by which Sirius Black's close school friends called him.

In connecting Sirius Black to the Black Dog folklore, Rowling associates him with ominous death and danger. This supports the plot and serves the tone of the entire book well, for Harry and everyone else come to believe that Sirius Black will attempt to kill Harry soon. In this way, Sirius, like the Black Dog of legend, is also believed to be an omen of death. Herein lies the twist, however, for at the end of *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* Rowling reveals that Sirius was not the traitor he was believed to be,

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[56] Rowling, <u>Prisoner</u> 107.
[57] Colbert, The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter (New York: Berkley Books, 2001) 44.
[58] Carol Rose, <u>Spirits, Fairies, Leprechauns, and Goblins</u> (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996) 42.
[59] Rose 68.

nor was he responsible for the deaths he had been convicted of, or any other deaths, for that matter. In fact, the wizarding world had been tricked and Sirius had been framed. In truth, Sirius had been flawlessly loyal to Harry's parents. After his escape from prison, Sirius followed Harry around, in both his dog and his human form, acting as a protector rather than a threat.

This revelation that Sirius Black is benign and protective, rather than murderous, also relates to both myth and legend. Although Black Dogs are commonly believed to be death omens, and that is certainly how Professor Trelawney perceives them, it is not always so, even in the world of legend and lore. In other parts of England, such as Weacombe and Somerset, there are many tales of Black Dogs guiding lost travelers home. In Suffolk such a dog is called the Black Schuck and is harmless if left alone. The Essex Shuck is said to protect those who come under attack.[60] The Church Grim, too, has its good points, for it paces through graveyards protecting the dead from the Devil.[61] This protective aspect of the Black Dog lore is reflected in Sirius Black's own role as guardian to Harry, as he protects him from the Dark Lord in *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Harry Potter and The Order of The Phoenix*.

Ultimately, the character of Sirius Black embodies not one, but two twists. The first twist lies within the surprise that Sirius was not the danger he was first portrayed as being. Although he was not a vicious dog like those feared in the ancient world, and he did not turn out to be a Grim-like omen of death for Harry, as was initially suggested in the storyline of *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*, he is still appropriately linked with death, as revealed in the fifth book. Ironically, in *Harry Potter and The Order of*

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[60] Rose 42.
[61] Colbert, Magical Worlds 42.

The Phoenix, Sirius meets his own sudden death. This death occurs within a year's time from his introduction to the series, much the way the legends tell of the Black Dog representing death within a year's time to those who see it. The second twist here is that after the reader realizes that Sirius, in Black Dog form or otherwise, is not an omen of death for Harry as was initially implied, it turns out that the Black Dog imagery is an omen of impending death in the series, after all. Interestingly, and most unexpectedly, it is Sirius himself who dies, rather than those who see him. His death is both sudden and unexpected, occurring within a year of the time Harry first saw him, just like the time frame of Black Dog lore.

Rowling's connection of Sirius Black to the ancients is a fitting one. The Egyptians believed that Sirius, the bright star, was the place where the souls of the dead traveled. Temples and pyramids were built to align with the star's appearance and trek across the sky.[62] This connection to the character and his name seems to foreshadow his fate in *Harry Potter and The Order of The Phoenix*. In the story, Sirius engages in a hand-to-hand, wand-to-wand, battle with Death Eaters in the Ministry of Magic building. He suddenly falls through The Veil, which is quite literally a veil and acts as the veil, or portal, between the world of the living and that of the dead. In so doing, Sirius is transported to the place where the souls of the dead travel. This occurrence relates to the Egyptian belief about the star from which Rowling takes his name.[63]

Rowling makes maximum use of the name Sirius. Sirius the Dog Star is the loyal canine companion to Orion. Sirius Black is the loyal (sometimes canine) companion to Harry's father and later to Harry himself. Sirius the Dog Star's connections to the

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[62] Colbert, <u>Magical World</u> 42.
[63] Whether Rowling intended this connection is unsure, but it is a fascinating and effective one nonetheless.

afterlife are also reflected in Sirius Black, who passes through the veil that divides the

living from the dead-- i.e., he dies. The name suggests the essence of Sirius' character

and foreshadows his unfortunate future. Drawing on the European lore of the Black Dog,

as noted, adds another level of interest to the character, as it temporarily misleads the

reader into believing Sirius is a threat to Harry and eventually serves to provide a final

twist to the significance of the Black Dog's role as a death omen (and how that figures

into Rowling's plot).[64]

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[64] The prominence of the theme of death, the role of Sirius Black, and the presence of other themes in the series are discussed further in Chapter IV.

III. THE EMBODIED IDEA: DESIRE, DEPRESSION AND DEATH

Sometimes Rowling uses ancient devices, like the notion of personification, in order to express the nature of a character. The Greek gods were the very embodiment of ideas, beautifully symbolized as powerful figures. For example, Venus was the embodiment of lust or passionate love. The Romans especially worshipped abstract concepts as deities. The Roman cult of Virtus was devoted to the idea of masculine virtue. Rowling creates beings that represent similarly abstract ideas.

In *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire,* a race called the veela appears. Rowling borrows them from the folk beliefs of Eastern Europe. They closely resemble the Greek mythological Dryads who protected the forests of the ancient world. Veela, like Dryads, are beautiful young maidens with flowing hair who dance and play in the woods, often by moonlight. Veela are generally harmless, but humans who witness their dancing can meet with unfortunate fates. People believed that any man who caught sight of a veela would fall under a spell of love-sickness, causing him to pine away for her until he ultimately died. Veela live in communities, much like Trooping Fairies, and are known to marry mortals and to give birth to their children.[65]

In the series, the veela make their first appearance at an international sporting event. Rowling created a clever sport called Quidditch, in which teams attempt to make goals with various balls high up in the air, while flying around on enchanted broomsticks. In *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, Harry and his friends attend the Quidditch World Cup Tournament. The national teams use creatures from their native land as team

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[65] Rose 326.

mascots. The mascots perform a pre-game show and act as a kind of cheerleading squad

throughout the match. Appropriately, the Bulgarian National Team mascots are veela.

Rowling's veela act as the symbol of desire (depicted as desire in the female form), and

most men (and some women) that lay eyes on them seem to lose control completely of

their faculties and good sense. Harry and the rest of the crowd fall under the veela's spell

as they perform at the tournament. When their music and dancing stop, he finds himself

poised on the wall of the stadium, as if he were about to jump. Ron, too, is inches from

completing a very dangerous dive. The entire crowd angrily boos the veela's exit from

the field. "The crowd didn't want the veela to go."[66]

Later in the book, the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry participates in

the traditional Triwizard Tournament in which Hogwarts and two other schools of magic

provide champions to compete in tasks that take place throughout the school year. The

champion for Beauxbatons School, Fleur Delacour, though only part veela (her

grandmother was a full blooded veela) still drives the boys mad at the sight of her. Harry

and Ron wae not immune to her appeal:

> "The champion for Beauxbatons," said Dumbledore, "is Fleur Delacour!"
> "It's her, Ron!" Harry shouted as the girl who so resembled a veela got gracefully
> to her feet, shook back her sheet of silvery blonde hair, and swept up between the
> Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables.[67]

Rowling's veela are well placed within the series. Choosing to introduce them into the

most hormonally charged book of the series, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, was

both clever and fitting. Rowling highlighted the book's tones of romantic teen angst

during a radio interview in 1999, "Yes, the hormones do kick in in Book Four."[68]

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[66] Rowling, Harry Poter and The Goblet of Fire (NY: Scholastic, 2005) 104.
[67] Rowling, Goblet 103.
[68] http://www.quickquote-quill.org/articles/1999/1099-connectiontransc.html

Rowling uses the veela to represent desire, thus setting the mood for one of the major themes of the book: the onset of sexual maturity. Lisa Damour discusses how the series mirrors the physical changes of puberty and notes the presence of such elements in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire.* For example, Damour cites the scene that features an assignment in Herbology class in which students learn to extract pus from a *bobotuber* plant. Damour notes the similarity between Rowling's description of this process and pimple squeezing.[69]

The book marks the halfway point in the seven book series. It also marks the halfway point for Harry and his friends in both their magical training and their coming of age. Harry and Ron are discovering girls (in a physical attraction sense) for the first time as they struggle along the path to manhood. All of the extraordinary events in the book, including magical spells, mythical creatures, and formidable enemies are interspersed throughout the very ordinary but equally challenging progression of Harry's first crush on a pretty classmate (Cho Chan).

Harry isn't the only one facing the awkward, sometimes painful experience of a crush. In fact, characters throughout the book make clumsy attempts at pairing up, whether they're fourteen years old or forty. Victor Krum, the Durmstrang champion and star player for the Bulgarian National Quidditch Team, spends half the school year pretending to study in the library, trying to work up the nerve to talk to Hermione. Hagrid, the giant groundskeeper, brushes his hair for the first time in years as he tries to woo the Beauxbatons giant Headmistress, Madame Maxime. Ron experiences extreme jealousy when he discovers that Hermione is attending the Yule Ball with Victor Krum,

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[69] Anatol, 2-24. 19.

and attempts to console himself (and torture Hermione) by publicly kissing Lavender Brown at every opportunity. This, in turn, seems to make Hermione equally jealous and miserable. Not one of these fumbling efforts at romance is successful in the fourth book. Cho begins dating Harry's rival; Hermione realizes she has little in common with Victor, who has to return to Bulgaria at the end of the school year anyway; Ron and Lavender finally come up for air from their marathon kissing sessions long enough to realize that they don't really have anything to build a relationship or even friendship upon; Hagrid offends Madame Maxime by suggesting that she comes from giant stock (a fact she wishes to hide), reversing their budding romance to the friendship stage by the end of the book. Ron and Hermione fail to define or solidify their relationship, even though it is now obvious that they both like each other romantically. Instead, they bicker incessantly like siblings throughout this book and the next. The role of the veela, and their appearance so early in the book, is to highlight the excitement of wanting someone and the misery of failing to win the object of one's desire. They function not just as the mascots of the Bulgarian National Quidditch Team; but as mascots of the book itself, expressing the sometimes unbearable feelings that accompany the highs and lows of love. Rowling's readers, both young and old, can relate to the way all good sense disappears and is replaced by desperate foolishness in the lovelorn. Those who have experienced a crush can identify with feeling as if they were caught in a spell like that of the veela. Rowling's veela represent this hormonal, emotional rollercoaster and foreshadow the disappointing crushes that occur throughout the book. They also offer up a powerful, somewhat comical perspective of what it is like to endure the excitement and disappointment of unrequited love.

In her essay, "Reversals and Revulsions at Hogwarts," Jann Lacoss suggests that the Harry Potter series enables readers, especially children, to deal with taboo themes. Lacoss cites violence, disgusting topics, witchcraft and evil as examples.[70] Certainly, all of these themes exist within the series, but there are others, too. Perhaps desire should be added to this list of taboos, as well.

Dementors are another race of creatures that appear in the series, and they may be the most frightening. In "A Skewed Reflection: The Nature of Evil," David and Catherine Deavel see them as the visual representation of death.[71] If so, they are more of a metaphorical, emotional death, rather than a death of the mind and body, as the Deavels suggest. It is understandable that the Deavels think of death when considering the dementors' physical appearance. A kind of cross between Tolkien's Dark Riders (who are undead) and the Grim Reaper, the very personification of death, what little flesh they reveal is cold, gray and lifeless. The dementors' appearance is intended to be frightening, but it is their actions and effects upon others that are significant. Rowling has repeatedly explained that they represent depression, a disorder she experienced firsthand. "She said the choice was deliberate, and based on her own encounter with the disease, which she called the worst experience she has ever endured. Much worse, she says, than merely feeling 'sad'—a perfectly normal emotion—depression is an actual loss of feeling. That is just what happens to humans in the presence of Dementors."[72]

Dementors are first introduced in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, as the terrifying guardians of the prison. When Sirius Black escapes, many of them go searching for him at Hogwarts. Harry sees his first dementor on the train to Hogwarts. Its

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[70] Whited, 79-80.
[71] Baggett and Klein, 135-136.
[72] Colbert, Magical Worlds 65.

appearance is frightening, as are its effects. It is a dark, cloaked figure whose face cannot

be seen. In its presence, Harry and his companions are drained of all hope and happiness.

They are overcome with cold and despair.

Everyone within the vicinity of a dementor is deeply affected physically and

emotionally. This parallels the way those close to a victim of depression are affected by

the condition. Ron describes the emotional aspect of this encounter, "I felt weird," said

Ron, shifting his shoulders uncomfortably. Like I'd never be cheerful again."[73]

Rowling alludes to the dementor's role as a symbol of depression in the text. The

best known antidote to the effects of the dementors in Harry's world is chocolate.

Professor Lupin gives the students some chocolate after their encounter with the

dementor on the train. Chocolate is actually known to alleviate depression in the real

world as well.   Modern science acknowledges that it offers similar effects to those of

anti-depressant prescription drugs.[74] The dementors give face and form to an otherwise

vast and somewhat abstract condition that is internalized within the mind rather than

being visible upon the body. Although people throughout history have suffered from

depression, the disorder has only recently become widely recognized as a medical

condition. Rowling's personification of this idea is both modern and timely.

The mermaid is another creature included in the series. In *Fantastic Beasts and

Where to Find Them,* Rowling compares mermaids to the Sirens of ancient Greece.[75] In

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[73] Rowling, Prisoner 85.
[74] Colbert, Magical Worlds 65.
[75] Rowling, Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them (NY: Scholastic, 2001). Rowling wrote this
additional guide to accompany the Harry Potter series. It is designed as Harry's own textbook. Rowling
published it to raise money for children's charities through the aid of Comic Relief's Harry's Books fund.
It is a small enhancement to the series that features brief alphabetical descriptions of the many creatures
that are mentioned in the Harry Potter series. Rowling states, "Merpeople (also known as Sirens, Selkies,
Merrows)…The oldest recorded merpeople were known as sirens (Greece) and it is in warmer waters that

fact, the modern idea of mermaids can be traced back to the Greek Sirens. Although they were originally depicted with the bodies of birds in ancient artwork and literature,[76] Sirens were represented with fish tails by the seventh century AD and "still live on in the popular imagination as mermaids."[77] Rowling's merpeople are a kind of amalgamation of the ancient Sirens and the mermaids of more recent lore.

Sirens figure frequently in Classical mythology, but the earliest, most significant and well-known example of the Sirens in ancient literature can be found in Book Twelve of Homer's *Odyssey.* In the *Odyssey*, legend tells of sailors who were enchanted by the Sirens' song and landed on their island and died. On the island of these Sirens is a vast meadow of rotting corpses. The sirens try to entice Odysseus and his crew to the same fate, but he overcomes their allure by having himself tied to the mast of his ship and plugging the ears of his men with wax, as the sorceress Circe had instructed him:

> You will come first of all to the Sirens, who are enchanters
> of all mankind and whoever comes their way; and that man
> who unsuspecting approaches them, and listens to the Sirens
> singing, has no prospect of coming home and delighting
> his wife and little children as they stand about him in greeting,
> but the Sirens by the melody of their singing enchant him.
> They sit in their meadow, but the beach before it is piled with bone heaps
> Of men now rotted away, and the skins shrivel upon them.
> You must drive straight on past, but melt down sweet wax of honey
> And with it stop your companions' ears, so none can listen;
> The rest, that is, but if you yourself are wanting to hear them
> Then have them tie you hand and foot on the fast ship, standing
> Upright against the mast with the ropes' ends lashed around it,
> So that you can have joy in hearing the song of the Sirens;
> But if you supplicate your men and implore them to set you

we find the beautiful mermaids so frequently depicted in Muggle literature and painting…a love of music…is common to all merpeople." 29.

[76] See Euripides' *Helena* 17 "winged maidens"; Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* IV.898-9 "the clear-voiced Sirens…half human and half bird in form,"; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* V.551-553 "What reason ws there to give Achelous' daughters feathers and claws, but let them keep the faces of girls?"; and Hyginus' *Fab.* 125, 141.

[77] W.P. Mustard. "Siren-Mermaid." <u>Modern Language Notes</u> 23 No.1 (Jan. 1908) 21-24.

Free, then they must tie you fast with even more lashings.[78]

   Homer does not describe the Siren's physical features, but many of the well-known

depictions of Sirens (at the time) portrayed them as part bird. Their winged bodies are

explained by Ovid much later in his *Metamorphoses*:

> …What reason
> Was there to give Achelous' daughters feathers
> And claws, but let them keep the faces of girls?
> Was it because they were with her [Proserpine] when she gathered
> Those fateful flowers? They were her dear companions,
> The Sirens, skilled in singing, and they sought her
> Through all the lands in vain, and came to the ocean
> And prayed that they might seek her there, be given
> Wings for their quest, and hover over the waters,
> And the gods were kind, and gave them golden plumage,
> But let them keep the lovely singing voices,
> So dear to the ears of men, the human features,
> The human voice, the dower of song forever.[79]

Ovid refers here to the myth that Sirens once dwelled in rivers, but they offended

Aphrodite and were transformed into vicious creatures with bird bodies and left to dwell

on an isolated island off of Italy's southern coast.

   Although scholars have debated the nature of the ancient Sirens, their most

important aspects are obvious. If we return to the *Odyssey,* our earliest literary source for

the Sirens, we find that they are most significantly characterized by their enchanting

magical song, the dangers they pose to the listeners of that song, and their association

with the sea.[80]

   As Gerald K. Gresseth points out in his article, "The Homeric Sirens," "the

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[78] Homer, Odyssey 12.39-54.

[79] Ovid 5.551-563.

[80] Although in the *Odyssey* the Sirens are perhaps no more closely associated with the sea than some of the other beings Odysseus encounters, they are directly associated with the sea in later literature. Even in the *Odyssey* we can see that they dwell on an island surrounded by the ocean and their victims are exclusively sailors. The setting for the dramatic scene in which Odysseus is bound to the mast of his ship, hearing the Sirens' song, also takes place upon the sea.

leitmotif of the whole episode, which we may call Magic Song, stands out quite clearly.

This theme dominates the episode from beginning to end."[81] It may be the sweetness of

their song that is enchanting, or it may be the actual lyrics (content) of their song.

Perhaps it is the combination of both that makes the song so perilously irresistible. More

importantly, Gresseth identifies why the singing is so dangerous. He points out that

"Magic Song implies bewitchment, perhaps some kind of sleep, in any case rendering

him [he who falls under the spell] helpless."[82] Gresseth compares this bewitchment to a

motif that is common in Greek literature, stating that "the most famous case is doubtless

the Binding Song sung by the Furies in the *Eumenides."* The Sirens' song, acting as a

kind of binding spell, destroys the will of their victims, binding their minds and rendering

them totally helpless.[83]

In the *Odyssey,* the Sirens' song poses a very specific threat to Odysseus. Ernst

Abrahamson correctly narrows the significance of Odysseus' adventures to a single

question: "If Odysseus is not dead, what keeps him from coming home?"[84] Regardless of

whether the Sirens will tempt him with unearthly melodies or the promise of

knowledge,[85] their success would prevent him from returning home. The many corpses

that rot upon the Sirens' island meadow reveal the final effects of their enchantment.

Whether the men pined away in a haze of forgetfulness, slowly starving to death or

drowned and washed ashore is unclear. What is clear is that they were sailors who never

returned home.

[81] Gresseth 205.
[82] Gresseth 207.
[83] Gresseth 208.
[84] Abrahamson. "The Adventures of Odysseus." The Classical Journal 51 No.7 (Apr. 1956):313-316.
[85] Homer, Odyssey 12.188-191. James C. Hogan makes a commonly expressed point in "The Temptation of Odysseus" when he says that in addition to the magical song itself, the Sirens' offer of knowledge about Troy and the future appeals to Odysseus' strong sense of curiosity. Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-) 106 (1976): 187-210, 199.

Ultimately, Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens is just one of many episodes in which he faces the danger of never returning home. Aside from being a legendary danger to the life of any sailor who may fall under the deadly spell of their song, the Sirens function as a thematic literary device in the *Odyssey*, endangering Odysseus' return home. It isn't always death that threatens his return. Odysseus' encounters with the Lotus Eaters, the Cyclops and Circe the sorceress are all major episodes in the plot which threaten the hero's return. Circe distracts Odysseus from his voyage home with magic and the pleasure of her company. The goddess Kalypso tempts him with her divine beauty and an offer of immortality in an effort to entice Odysseus to remain with her on her island.[86] Abrahamson describes Odysseus' tale as concerning "the suffering he had to undergo on his return—and for the sake of it; of the dangers he had to pass on his return—and that imperiled it; of the obstacles that were put in the way of his return."[87] Rowling carries on this literary tradition of the Sirens representing danger. In the *Harry Potter* series, the merpeople are used to announce and oversee a very dangerous tournament task. Aside from the physical danger of the task itself, they appear in the fourth book of the series, which is the book that marks the onset of puberty in the main characters and the physical return of Lord Voldemort. Metaphorically, the merpeople seem to refer to more than just the dangers of drowning. Just as Odysseus encounters many beings that distract him from his voyage, Harry Potter and his classmates encounter more distractions than ever in the fourth book. Some of Odysseus' distractions were sexual in nature, as with Circe and Kalypso. Parallel is the budding sexual awakening that first appears in *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*. It is represented by the

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[86] Homer, <u>Odyssey</u> 5.203-210.
[87] Abrahamson 315.

irresistible vela, Harry's crush on Cho Chan, Ron's physical experiences with his first girlfriend, and the many other romantic scenarios that play out in the series. Perhaps the merfolk are also metaphors for the dangers of sexual knowledge. Like the Sirens in the *Odyssey,* the onset of puberty threatens to distract Harry and his friends from the essential tasks at hand.

Over time, Sirens came to resemble more closely the mermaids we know today. As early as the seventh century they are depicted in art as part fish. Early English poetry regularly presents the Siren as a mermaid who is half fish, instead of half bird like the ancient depictions.[88] W.P. Mustard attributes the change from part bird to part fish as possibly being due to a Northern influence and a "Teutonic influence" but this is just a suggestion. He reminds us that in French, Italian and Spanish literature, " the Siren seems to have been always part fish."[89]

iIn later literature, mermaids often keep the Sirens' trait of singing. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* describes a character who "sang more merrily than a mermaid in the sea (for Physiologus says reliably that mermaids sing well and merrily)."[90] Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* mentions a singing mermaid, as does Spenser's *Faeirie Queen.* Mermaids continue to be associated with danger as well. Alexander Barclay's third *Eclogue* mentions mermaids as one of the many dangers of the sea, saying they are "singing, abusing with their song."[91]

J.K. Rowling's merpeople have much in common with the Greek Sirens but also

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[88] Mustard 21. Mustard traces the progression of Sirens to mermaids and notes their earliest appearances as part fish. He cites Dr. R. Morris' *Old English Miscellany* which offers a section entitled "Natura Sirene" and describes the "mereman" as "half man half fish."

[89] Mustard 22. Mustard offers northern literary examples from such authors as Boiardo, Gervaise , Wace and Boccacio.

[90] Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales Trans. A. Kent Hieatt and Constance Hieatt. (NY: Bantam, 1964) *The Nun's Priest's Tale* 450-452 (page 405).

[91] Mustard offers these examples on page 21.

resemble more modern representations. Like the Sirens (and mermaids), Rowling's

merfolk are associated with singing, danger and the sea. Homer's Sirens are a metaphor

for the dangers that threaten Odysseus' return home. Rowling's mermaids are a

metaphorical danger for the unidentified perils awaiting Harry and his friends in the

future. More immediately, they seem to refer to the hormonal distractions that have

preoccupied the characters and that may threaten their success in school and, more

importantly, their ongoing battle against the Dark Lord.

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, mermaids play a key role in the second

task of the Triwizard Tournament. After completing the first task, which was stealing a

golden egg from a dragon, Harry is told that the egg holds the clue to the successful

completion of the next task. Whenever Harry opens the egg, however, he hears nothing

but a horrible, incomprehensible screeching. Eventually he discovers that the egg is

intended to be opened under water, and when he does so, the noise becomes "a chorus of

eerie voices singing."[92] The clue is given in the form of mermaid song:

> Come seek us where our voices sound,
> We cannot sing above the ground,
> And while you're searching, ponder this:
> We've taken what you'll sorely miss,
> An hour long you'll have to look,
> And to recover what we took,
> But past an hour—the prospect's black,
> Too late, it's gone, it won't come back.[93]

Like the Sirens of the *Odyssey,* the merpeople seem to be offering knowledge in a

dangerous way. This clue reveals that Harry and the other tournament champions will

have to find a way to complete a dangerous, hour-long underwater search for something

hidden in the Black Lake on Hogwarts grounds, where *merpeople* and other mysterious

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[92] Rowling, <u>Goblet</u> 462.
[93] Rowling 463.

creatures dwell within its deepest, darkest waters. Unlike the winged Sirens of Greece,

Rowling's mermaids are part fish. They are also far less appealing than the lovely

mermaids of nineteenth-century art and literature, or more modern depictions such as the

1980s films, *Splash* and *The Little Mermaid*:

> The merpeople had grayish skin and long, wild, dark green hair. Their eyes were
> yellow, as were their broken teeth, and they wore thick ropes of pebbles around
> their necks. They leered at Harry as he swam past; one or two of them emerged
> from their caves to watch him better, their powerful, silver fish tails beating the
> water, spears clutched in their hands.[94]

Just like the Greek Sirens, Rowling's mermaids like to sing, and their songs have the

power to draw humans to them:

> [Harry] was passing over vast expanses of black mud now, which swirled murkily
> as he disturbed the water. Then at long last he heard a snatch of haunting
> mersong.[95]

Harry follows the mersong to the designated location of the second task and when he

arrives, "A choir of merpeople [is] singing in the middle [of the mer-village square]

calling the champions toward them."[96]

The mersong, like that of the ancient Sirens, leads Harry and the other champions

into danger. Many dangers await the champions in the Black Lake. First, of course, is

the water itself. Humans are not able to breathe under water, and although all of the

champions use magic and potions to breathe in the lake, such wizardry is dangerously

advanced (much can go wrong) and even when well-executed, the effects are temporary,

lasting barely an hour. Should the champions find themselves deep below the water

when the spell wears off, drowning is a very likely possibility.

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[94] Rowling 497-498.
[95] Rowling, <u>Goblet</u> 497.
[96] Rowling 498.

There are other dangers, too, such as the nasty grindylows, or horned water demons, that hide in the tall underwater weeds and grab the champions as they swim past. It is unclear whether they seek to eat the champions, or simply to drown them, but whatever their intent, they are a danger to Harry and his fellow champions.

Rowling, of course, alters mermaid lore beyond a mere difference in appearance. Her merfolk's singing only sounds good under the water and is horrible above it. This is remarkably different from the Sirens' song, which is so bewitching to sailors. Rowling may have made this change in order to add an element of beauty to the mysteries and anxieties of awkward adolescence, represented here by the dark waters. The mermaids' place in *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire* is directly related to the puberty motif of the story.

Like the veela, Rowling's mermaids appear at an effective time in the fourth book. As previously mentioned, this book marks the halfway point for the series as well as for Harry's attainment of his majority. In this book, more than any other in the series, the reader gets the sense that everything is going to change drastically. To emphasize this point, Rowling ends the book with the very sudden, unexpected death of a major character. This is when her readers must acknowledge that these are not just simple, contemporary children's stories, that there will not always be happy endings. Change has arrived, in all of its familiar and frightening forms. From hormones to death, the message is clear: nothing remains the same, at Hogwarts or anywhere else. The mounting pressures of growing up physically, emotionally and intellectually boil to overflowing in the fourth book. In it, the fear of the unknown emerges as a central theme. Whether it is the simple fear of the tournament tasks at hand, the fear of approaching the opposite sex,

or the fear of passing increasingly difficult exams or of facing an increasingly powerful enemy, the future for Harry Potter and his friends is as dark and murky as the mysterious, dangerous depths of the mermaids' realm. Rowling's mermaids are an ideal embodiment of the fear of the unknown, and their underwater world is a fitting metaphor for the future awaiting the students of Hogwarts.

IV. THEMES IN HARRY POTTER

Rowling incorporates many themes into the various plots and subplots of the series. These often reveal a glimpse of the author's (and perhaps society's) philosophical and social ideologies. Throughout the series, death appears as a recurring theme. The characters and the reader must face it in many manifestations and consider it from various perspectives. For children's literature, the series is especially dark in this regard. A number of writers noted the prevalence of this theme in Rowling's work. Jerry Walls, for example, explores the philosophical and moral implications of the concept in his essay, "Heaven, Hell, and Harry Potter."[97] Rowling employs writing devices, such as the symbolic use of names that was discussed in Chapter II, in order to explore and refer to important themes.

Death is a predominant theme, and in Rowling's hands, Sirius Black's character becomes a tool through which she can explore the idea. In telling Sirius' story Rowling prods the reader into considering the fear of imminent death, the way the superstitious anticipate death after seeing The Grim. She first refers to the idea in regard to Sirius in his name and his dog form. Later, she engages the reader in the exploration of this theme through the various plot twists surrounding Sirius. Rowling's rendering of Sirius Black's death as quick also forces Harry, and thereby the reader, too, to deal with the issue of a sudden and unexpected death. Rowling's own mother passed away when Rowling began writing the series. Although Rowling's mother had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis the year before, her death still seemed sudden to Rowling, and it left her feeling "guilty" and "distraught."[98] Harry experiences the same feelings after Sirius' sudden

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[97] Baggett and Klein, 63-76.
[98] Shapiro 51.

death, revealing some parallels between Rowling's loss of a parent and Harry' similar

loss:

> The guilt filling the whole of Harry's chest like some monstrous, weighty parasite now writhed and squirmed. Harry could not stand this, he could not stand being Harry anymore…He had never felt more trapped inside his own head and body, never wished so intensely that he could be somebody – anybody else…[99]

Professor Dumbledore, the wise and kindly headmaster of Hogwarts, aptly describes how

Harry feels about Sirius' death. Harry repeatedly claims not to care anymore about

anything, but Dumbledore is able to put into words the emotions that have overcome

Harry:

> "You do care…You care so much you feel as though you will bleed to death with the pain of it…You have now lost your mother, your father, and the closest thing to a parent you have ever known. Of course you care."[100]

The misuse of power is another significant theme and it is central to Rowling's

notion of what is bad. Our first glimpse of Harry, as a ten-year-old being raised by his

Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon, highlights the theme immediately within the series.

Harry is introduced as a kind of Cinderella figure, an orphan who is despised and

mistreated by his Aunt and Uncle, the Dursleys. He is forced to live in the cupboard

under the stairs while his cousin, Dudley, has not one, but two bedrooms. Dudley is

spoiled, while Harry is forced to do a great number of chores and to wear Dudley's huge,

ill-fitting hand-me-down clothes. Everyone in the Dursley household bullies and

mistreats Harry, abusing their power over him.

Rowling offers up various examples of such abusers throughout the series. She

suggests that people abuse power to varying degrees, making the point that schoolyard

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[99] Rowling, Harry Potter and The Order of The Phoenix (NY: Scholastic, 2003) 822.
[100] Rowling, Order 824.

bullies (like Draco Malfoy) and powerful political figures (like High Inquisitor Delores

Umbridge) exhibit variations of the same unethical behavior. The two would view

themselves as being on opposite sides. Draco's family is associated with the Dark Arts

and Lord Voldemort, whereas Umbridge works for the ministry, which opposes the Dark

Arts. Yet Rowling repeatedly emphasizes how they are both bad, for they both are guilty

of abusing their power.

This idea is especially prominent in the character of Professor Severus Snape. His

first name comes from the Latin term for harsh or severe. It may also refer to the Roman

Emperor, Septimius Severus, who gained and maintained control of the Empire with

bloody force. Snape is a cruel teacher who sadistically enjoys humiliating students in his

Potions classes. He is insulting and vicious in his remarks and unfairly exhibits

favoritism to the students that are in his own house of Slytherin. Examples of Snape's

abuse abound, but his cruelty is obvious from the very first day Harry and his friends sit

in Snape's class. He humiliates Neville, a timid student who mistakenly spills his potion,

melting a cauldron and burning holes into the floor:

> Within seconds, the whole class was standing on their stools while Neville, who
> had been drenched in the potion when the cauldron collapsed, moaned in pain as
> angry red boils sprang up all over his arms and legs.
> "Idiot boy!" snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion away with a wave of his
> wand. "I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off
> the fire?"
> Neville whimpered as boils started to pop all over his nose.[101]

Snape begins verbally abusing Neville and insulting him by calling him an idiot. He then

twists Neville's accident into an opportunity to attack Harry and to punish Gryffindor

House. Although he does not physically harm the students, he bullies them. Like Argus,

he enjoys dishing out unfair punishment. Snape provides another example of the way

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[101] Rowling, Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone, Trans. David Grene (NY: Scholastic, 1997) 138.

people abuse the power they are given. Rowling refers to this issue repeatedly, revealing it to be a significant character trait of an evil-doer.

Rita Skeeter, a prominent reporter in the wizarding world, is an example of the media's abuse of power. Rita takes extreme liberties with the truth and fills her columns and articles with tabloid style gossip designed to ruin the reputations of those featured. The Malfoy family represents the kind of abuse of power that occurs among the wealthy. Lucius Malfoy's money earns him a place on the board of Hogwarts' administration, and it also buys his son a place on the Slytherin Quidditch Team.

There are countless other examples of those who misuse their authority, in whatever form it exists, throughout the Harry Potter series. None is more obvious or extreme than the Dark Lord himself, who abuses his power to the point of costing others their freedom of will, their sanity, and their lives. The underlying message in all of these instances is that to use power to further one's own selfish agenda or to harm others, and to ignore the consideration of what is just, is an evil that occurs all the time, to various degrees. This is one of the ways that Rowling works to make the point that evil is not something outside ourselves, but is the result of the choices we make every day.

Rowling's play on the Argus myth, as discussed in Chapter II, is a clever method of accentuating Argus Filch's clumsy abuse of power. After all, both sets of eyes at his disposal are supposed to be used to watch over the students of Hogwarts in order to ensure their safety, yet he continually uses them in an attempt to bully, punish and harm them. Fortunately for the students, he is not very successful. Filch is clearly someone who is more interested in punishing students, regardless of whether or not they are guilty. As eager as Filch is to catch students in wrong-doing, he frequently jumps to the wrong

conclusion and comes to represent unfair persecution in the form of a sadistic personality that enjoys seeing others suffer. Filch often reveals his longing for the good old days of Hogwarts history, when chains, thumbscrews, and other medieval punishments were used upon the students, and he laments the softer punishments of the present Hogwarts.

Another significant theme throughout the series is the power of choice. While Greek literature often insists upon the unavoidable existence of fate, Rowling's work illustrates the role of individual choice. Just before entering the palace at Mycenae, Cassandra speaks:

> Oh men, your destiny.
> When all is well a shadow can overturn it.
> When trouble comes a stroke of the wet sponge,
> and the picture's blotted out. And that,
> I think that breaks the heart.[102]

J.K. Rowling's treatment of Sybill Trelawney enables her to emphasize further the importance and power of the choices people make. It becomes obvious as the series progresses, that in Rowling's view, what makes people good or bad are their choices. Therefore, the confusion about whether Sybill Trelawney is a real seer or not is easily cleared up when Rowling's ethical view is considered. It isn't that the seer is wrong, even when her predictions do not come true. She may be right, initially, when making them. To Rowling, though, there is no inevitable fate awaiting us all. Nothing is predetermined. The choices and actions of people make all the difference. If the sum of our choices can make us good or bad, they are certainly powerful enough to change the course of events, thus thwarting whatever fate seemed to exist. Perhaps if Harry and so many others had done nothing to change the outcome, the doom that Sybill Trelawney foresaw would have come to fruition just as she predicted. The mistake is in forgetting to

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[102] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking, 1975. 1350-54.

take into account the variable qualities of choice. David and Catherine Deavel explain

that the *Harry Potter* series reveals that one of evil's deceptions is that "one has no

choice whether to succumb to it or not" and that "this theme runs throughout the

series."[103] People like Harry can step in and alter the future. This further supports one of

Rowling's underlying messages. Much like the proverbial saying, the series suggests that

the only thing that evil needs to triumph is for good people to do nothing. Sybill

Trelawney and all the mythical associations that surround her name and the name of her

grandmother,[104] represent the folly of believing that one can do nothing to avoid fate.[105]

In this way, Rowling seems to agree with J.R.R. Tolkien that a single person can change

everything, even a person as small as a hobbit or a boy.[106]

Harry, like Frodo in Tolkien's *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, comes from a humble

life and embarks on dangerous adventures, facing powerful enemies, and selflessly acts in

the best interests of his world. Rowling's use of Professor Trelawney reminds us that this

is possible, even in the face of great odds. Professor Trelawney's grave predictions might

have come true, if no one had taken action to stop Voldemort's wicked plans. Bagget and

Klein also acknowledge the importance of taking action in Rowling's writing.[107] When

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[103] Baggett and Klein, 142. The Deagels compare Rowling's perspective to that of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas: "Moral evil results from free choice of the will." 144.

[104] In much of Greek literature, there is an overwhelming emphasis upon the role of fate. In Aeschylus' Rowling, <u>Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone,</u> Trans. David Grene (NY: Scholastic, 1997) 138.

[104] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking, 1975. 1350-54. *Agamemnon,* which features the tragic seer, Cassandra (for whom Sybill Trelawney's grandmother may be named), the doom of fate looms heavily before the characters and the audience, alike. Counts described this, saying, "The prevailing tone or mood in the tragedy is a somber sense of destiny or fate. As the play opens, the chorus suggests a feeling of foreboding which grows stronger and is still there when they should be rejoicing at Agamemnon's homecoming. When Cassandra appears, she paints with frightening details what has been but a vague feeling of unrest among them; their angry rejection of her truth reflects their fear." Counts, 35.

[105] While it is most likely that Rowling based her character of Cassandra on a very general sense of a prophetess who is doomed not to be believed, looking closely at ancient sources still offers a fascinating glimpse of details that may or may not have inspired Rowling's writing.

[106] Tolkien, J.R.R. <u>The Lord of The Rings</u>. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954.

[107] Baggett and Klein, 21.

characters like Harry and his friends stand up to more powerful figures like Voldemort, Snape, Delores Umbridge, and the Malfoys, they are able to change the outcome of Professor Trelawney's horrible predictions. Although they are just children, they can change the future.

Other writers have identified the role of morality in the series. In his essay "Kreacher's Lament: S.P.E.W. as a Parable on Discrimination, Indifference, and Social Justice," Steven Patterson points out another of the recurring moral themes in the *Harry Potter* series: discrimination. He notes that Rowling's depiction of discrimination and those who practice it reveals her belief that it "is something practiced by <u>evil</u> people."[108] This comes as no surprise to Deirdre F. Baker, who describes how "we can map a history of attitudes toward race and diversity by means of fantasy for children."[109] The truth of Patterson's point is apparent in the examples he cites, such as the role of House Elves as servants in the series. Patterson devotes significant attention to this example, but there are others. Discrimination is present throughout the series. The character of Professor Lupin exemplifies this issue.

Through both his name and his physical form, Rowling makes mythical references to enhance the significance and meaning of Professor Remus Lupin's role in the plot. Professor Lupin receives discriminatory treatment (due to his being a werewolf) in the wizarding world, thus representing victims of discrimination in the contemporary world. Elaine Ostry describes the presence of issues like racism within the series. Her article "Accepting Mudbloods: The Ambivalent Social Vision of J.K. Rowling's Fairy

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[108] Bagget and Klein, 105.

[109] Deirdre F. Baker, "Musings on Diverse Worlds," <u>Horn Book Magazine</u> 83 (Jan./Feb. 2007): 41-47, 41. Baker explores how children's fantasy literature reflects contemporary ideas about otherness. She specifically cites J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Rowling for comparison.

Tales" discusses how Rowling updates fairytale motifs to reflect her own social agenda. Ostry identifies this agenda as being concerned with racial and economic prejudices.[110]

A werewolf, generally speaking, is a person who transforms into a bloodthirsty wolf. Such transformations usually occur at night during the full moon. Werewolves become so in a variety of ways. Some transform because it is their heritage. Their parents are werewolves. Others are bitten by another werewolf. Still others become werewolves after receiving a powerful curse. The werewolf cannot control his actions, nor can he control (usually) whether he becomes a wolf or not.

Rowling makes clever use of werewolf lore, which, not surprisingly, can be traced back to ancient Greek mythology and Classical literature. The belief in werewolves was written about throughout the ancient world beginning in the fourth century B.C. Greece. Herodotus makes a connection between lycanthropy and sorcery in the fourth century B.C.E. as he describes the practices of the Neuri people of Scythia. He refers to the insistence of Scythians and Greeks living in Scythia that each of the Neuri transforms into a wolf for a few days every year and then return to their human form. Although Herodotus is not a believer or an eyewitness, he notes the conviction with which the stories were been told to him.[111] There has been some debate about the connection between Hellenic mythological accounts of animal-metamorphoses to the previous existence of animal cults.[112] Eckels refers to the worship of Zeus Lycaeus on Mount

[110] Anatol, 89-99.

[111] Herodotus, The History. Trans. David Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 4.105, p.319. Herodotus writes, "It may be that these people are wizards. For it is said by both the Scythians and the Greeks who live in Scythia that once every year every one of the Neuri becomes a wolf for some days and again turns back into his own shape."

[112] Eckels, Richard Preston. Greek Wolf-Lore. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1937. Dissertation. Eckels questions the previously held assumption, as found in the work of A.B. Cook, that wolf transformation stories must be rooted in the practices of animal cults. 38-40. Eckels also explores the role

Lycaeon in Arcadia. At the top of Lycaeon was an earthen and ash altar of Zeus Lycaeus

and a temenos into which entry was forbidden. Pausanias tells of human sacrifice being

made at the altar. Those who ate human flesh at the sacrificial feast were believed to be

transformed into wolves.[113] Little is available to us now that illuminates the details of this

cult, but it is clear that animals, including wolves, played a significant role in the

religious practices associated with Mt. Lycaeon.

While Herodotus associates lycanthropy with magic, other ancient writers connect

the wolf-form with demons or ghosts. Pausanias tells the story of Euthymus, a hero who

saved the Temesans (along with a lovely virgin) from a wolf-skin-clad ghost that plagued

the locals. The ghost was believed to be the demon of a drunken sailor who was stoned

to death for raping a virgin.[114] Demons were often said to take on animal shapes, but the

association of this ghost with the wolf may have been influenced by ideas of

werewolves.[115] Of course, the relatively few ancient Greek sources related to the topic

may suggest the possibility that the widespread importance of or belief in werewolves, as

we now know them, did not exist in ancient Greece. However, some of the basic

attributes of werewolves, such as their connection to the moon and the night, may have

started with Greek cult figures and beliefs. Hecate, for example, was a popular goddess

who first appears in Greek literature in Hesiod's *Theogony*.[116] Hecate has long been

associated with lunar lore, night creatures, nocturnal apparitions, dog sacrifices, and

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of the wolf in Greek religion and in regard to the Cult of Lykaios, suggests that it had little to do with
werewolves. 54.

[113] Pausanias 8.

[114] Pausanias, F. Spiro, ed. and trans. Pausanias' Description of Greece (Tuebner: 1903) 6.6.7-11. "…and in
the midst of things was the ghost that Euthymus cast out. His skin was awfully black and he was utterly
terrifying to see. His clothing wa a wolfskin…and gave him the name Lycas/Alibas ["Wolfy" or
"Corpse"]."

[115] Daniel Ogden. Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds (New York: Oxford
University Press, 2002) 176.

[116] Hesiod 411-52.

packs of barking hell-hounds. These connections may have influenced the development

of wolf (and werewolf) lore, with its own nocturnal and lunar associations.

The first werewolf may have been Lycaon,[117] who aroused Zeus' fury

when he served him a human child's flesh to eat. Zeus punished Lycaon by transforming

him into a wolf who kept some of his human features. This story is retold by Ovid in

Metamorphoses:[118]

> In vain he attempted to speak; from that very instant
> His jaws were bespluttered with foam, and only he thirsted
> For blood, as he raged amongst flocks and panted for slaughter.
> His vesture was changed into hair, his limbs became crooked;
> A wolf, -- he retains yet large trace of his ancient expression,
> Hoary he is afore, his countenance rabid,
> His eyes glitter savagely still, the picture of fury.[119]

The Elder Pliny, the Roman naturalist, wrote skeptically of werewolves in the first

century A.D.:

> I am obliged to consider—and with confidence—that the assertion that men are
> turned into wolves and back to themselves again is false, otherwise we must also
> believe in all the other things that over so many generations we have discovered
> to be fabulous. I must nevertheless show the origin of this belief, which is so
> ingrained in popular lore that werewolves are regarded as people under a curse.
>
> According to Euanthes, a writer well respected among Greek authors, the
> Arcadians say that someone chosen by lot, out of the clan of a certain Anthus, is
> led out to a marsh in that region. Having hung his clothes on an oak-tree, he
> swims across the water and goes to a deserted place. There he is changed into a
> wolf and associates with other wolves for nine years. If he has avoided contact
> with a human during that period, he returns to the same marsh, swims across it
> and regains his shape with nine years' age added to his former appearance.
> Euanthes also affirms the more incredible fact that he gets back into the same
> clothes.
>
> It is astonishing how far Greek gullibility will go. There is no occurrence so

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[117] This may be the first literary example of lycanthropy.

[118] Although this story is best preserved by Ovid, a Roman writer, it reflects a Greek myth told through the Roman lens of this author.

[119] Ovid i.237-243.

fabulously shameless that it lacks a witness.[120]

The idea of werewolves changed remarkably in Roman culture. The Romans did not relate to it in a religious context, as the Greeks did. Instead it served as fantastic and frightening fictional entertainment. This approach is much more in line with the modern idea of the subject. Perhaps the most famous account of a werewolf in ancient literature is Petronius' *Satyricon*. It is the first prose work about a werewolf, and it seems to have "introduced key elements that have been incorporated into werewolf stories ever since."[121] The association of the werewolf with night, a full moon, disrobing and graves are elements that have remained in werewolf lore, even today. In the story, Nicero tells a frightening tale about seeing a man turn into a werewolf before his own eyes:

> The moon was shining so brightly it was as light as midday. We passed between the tombs; when your man began to piss against the monuments, I walked on, singing away and counting the gravestones. But then when I looked back at my companion, he stripped off and laid all his clothes by the side of the road. My heart was in my mouth, and I stood there, rigid as a corpse. He pissed round his garments, and suddenly turned into a wolf, and then he began to howl, and he disappeared into the woods…I drew near to pick up his clothes, but they had turned into stone.[122]

Rowling's werewolf is Professor Remus Lupin, who comes to Hogwarts to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts classes. Of course, when he makes his first appearance in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban,* the reader is not informed of his condition. As with so many of Rowling's characters, his full and true nature is revealed later, but as always, she provides the reader with hints and clues along the way. As is often the case, she begins her allusions to Professor Lupin's werewolf identity with his name. In so

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[120] Pliny The Elder, <u>Natural History: A Selection</u> Trans. John Healy (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 8.80-82.

[121] Brian J. Frost. <u>The Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature</u>. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) 51.

[122] Arbiter Petronius, <u>Satyricon</u> Trans. P.G. Walsh (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 62 p.50-51.

doing, she intentionally refers to Roman, rather than Greek myth. Lupin comes from

lupinus, the Latin adjective meaning *of a wolf* or *like a wolf.* Romulus and Remus, the

legendary founders of Rome, are said to have been suckled by a wolf and raised as her

own young when they were left for dead in the countryside. The wolf and the boys are

still a highly recognized symbol of Rome, appearing in art, architecture and even

currency.   This story, as will be explored further, provides important context for the

character of Professor Lupin.

Lupin is always described as pale and tired looking. His grey hair is cleverly

likened to the color of the silvery moonlight in the series. At the end of *Harry Potter and*

the Prisoner of Azkaban, Hermione Granger discovers the professor's condition and

when she confronts him he describes his life as a werewolf. He explains that he was

bitten as a child by a werewolf, and that the potion he takes renders him harmless during

full moons. The potion is a recent development, however. Life before it was more

difficult for Lupin:

> Before the Wolfsbane Potion was discovered, however, I became a fully fledged
> monster once a month. It seemed impossible that I would be able to come to
> Hogwarts. Other parents weren't likely to want their children exposed to me.
> But then Dumbledore became Headmaster, and he was sympathetic. He said that
> as long as we took certain precautions there was no reason I shouldn't come to
> school…
>
> …Once a month, I was smuggled out of the castle, into this place, to
> transform…My transformations in those days were---were terrible. It is very
> painful to turn into a werewolf. I was separated from humans to bite, so I bit and
> scratched myself instead…[123]

Rowling, like Ovid, portrays a man forced into becoming a dangerous beast. Unlike

Ovid's Lycaon, Rowling's character is an innocent victim who does nothing to invite this

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[123] Rowling, <u>Prisoner</u> 352-353.

curse. He was just a child when he was attacked. There are other twists, as well. As children, the legendary twins were nurtured by a wolf, whereas Lupin, as a child, was attacked and bitten by a wolf. In naming the professor Remus Lupin, Rowling connects him to the myth of Rome's founding twins. In so doing, she draws from the duality of the idea of twins in order to represent Lupin's dual nature of wolf versus man. In linking him to these particular twins who were raised by a wolf, Rowling alludes to Lupin's own very intimate connection, or kinship, to wolves. This is further reinforced by the legend of boys raised as wolves who return to civilization and found a great nation:

> Then Romulus, proud in the tawny skin of his wolf-nurse shall follow. He shall build the Martial City, and stamp his name upon Rome.[124]

The legendary life story of Romulus echoes the cyclic existence of Professor Lupin, who was forced as a boy to leave society and go into the wild during the full moon, only to return to Hogwarts when the moon waned. He graduated from Hogwarts and went out into the world, only to return eventually to the school as a professor once the civilizing power of Wolfsbane Potion was discovered and made available to him. In returning to Hogwarts as a teacher, he returned to civilization as a leader of sorts, which is reminiscent of the role of Romulus.

Like that famous Roman twin, Professor Lupin served as a kind of founder as well. Every student at Hogwarts agreed that he was the very best Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher Hogwarts had ever seen, and his role in the lives of some of the students, such as Harry, Hermione, Ron and a few others was empowering and life saving. He inspired Harry to train outside of class and homework assignments in his magical defense techniques. In later books, this independent training and self-teaching

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[124] Vergil 1 p.7.

results in the students creating a secret group called Dumbledore's Army, which goes on to play a major role in the ever-growing battle against the Dark Lord and his followers, the Death Eaters.

Like the Roman twin, Lupin's efforts result in a kind of powerful new society. Rowling's use of the classical werewolf mythology, referred to in the professor's name, reflects the character's own personal history, points to his true nature, and hints at his future role in the series. Rowling was careful to name Lupin after Remus rather than Romulus. Remus Lupin is named for the sacrificed brother instead of the murderous one who became Rome's first king. This emphasizes his role as a victim and distances him from the violent characteristics of werewolves. Rowling highlights his gentler nature and his tragic story.

The legend of Romulus and Remus is best known to us through the writings of Livy, Ovid and Plutarch. There are some variations among authors, of course, but the legend is essentially the same. Its most common form is told thus. King Numitor's brother deposed him and made Numitor's daughter a Vestal virgin. She was ravished by Mars and gave birth to twins (Romulus and Remus). Her uncle ordered the twins to be thrown into the Tiber River. The box that held them drifted ashore, washing them onto the bank where a she-wolf cared for and nursed them until a herdsman and his wife found them and raised them as their own. Both boys became exceptionally strong and skilled young men and eventually they killed Amulius together and reinstated Numitor as king. The twins founded the city at the site of Rome and Romulus built a wall around it. Along with his lieutenant, Romulus killed Remus for leaping over the walls. Romulus reigned

over the settlement for decades before disappearing in a storm.[125]

The most remarkable difference between the werewolves of antiquity and Rowling's werewolf is that usually, as with the accounts of Pausanias and Petronius, the character of the man is consistent when he is transformed into a wolf. For example, Pausanias' wolf-ghost was a violent predator in life as evidenced by his brutally raping a virgin, and he is therefore violent in demonic wolf form. Petronius' werewolf was a brave and seemingly likeable soldier. He was not a criminal or unduly violent. He exercised some caution and restraint at the time of his transformation, removing his clothes and urinating around them to turn them to stone to await his return. Although alone in the cemetery with the narrator of the tale, the werewolf turns and runs off into the woods. He spends the night devouring the flocks of the inn, rather than the people there. G.B. Riddehough noticed this tendency in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

> Ovid…has the Roman sense of justice: if the man-turned-beast possesses repulsive qualities, they are due not so much to his transformation as to what was in him while he was still human. Lycaon, changed to a wolf, still keeps his murderous ferocity…On the other hand, softer and pleasanter human tendencies can also survive the change.[126]

Rowling's werewolf is different. Professor Lupin, a gentle and intelligent man, is altered more than just physically when transformed into a wolf. He takes great precaution (while in human form) to ensure that he is not able to harm people during his transformations. When he was a student, Professor Dumbledore created the Shrieking Shack, guarded by the magical Whomping Willow Tree, to serve as a safe house for Lupin. He stole away to this secure spot to endure his transformation periods. The

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[125] Livy, Stories of Rome .Trans. Roger Nichols (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 1.3.10ff; Ovid, Fasti Trans. Betty Rose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 4.807-62; Plutarch, Romulus Trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 3ff.
[126] Riddehough, G.B. "Man-Into-Beast Changes in Ovid." Phoenix 13 No.4 (Winter 1959): 201-209. 201.

presumption here is that if such precautions were not taken, Lupin would attack people.

His best friends had to assume the form of animals in order to approach him safely.

Sirius Black transformed into a great black dog for the sole purpose of accompanying

Lupin during full moons and preventing him from severely harming others or himself.

As an adult, Lupin was able to return to Hogwarts as a teacher thanks to the development

of a potion that prevented the transformation. Although he is depicted sympathetically,

Lupin's gentle nature disappears entirely when he is transformed into a wolf. This

effectively separates Lupin, the man, from his beastly affliction.

Rowling writes from a contemporary perspective in that Professor Lupin also

represents victims of discrimination in the modern world. He cannot help who he is, nor

can he help his physical condition. The tragedy of Professor Lupin's situation is that he

is judged by something that is beyond his control, rather than by the merit of his

character. This effectively symbolizes modern groups who are discriminated against

because of their race, religion, ethnicity, or physical condition. When Lupin refers to his

childhood and the fact that parents didn't want their children "exposed" to him, it is

startlingly similar to the panic during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s in America and

Europe, when so many parents did not want their children exposed to HIV positive

classmates in school. Lupin was a childhood victim of a bite, the way HIV positive

children were victims of tainted blood transfusions or the process of a natural birth.

Rowling has created in Professor Lupin's story, a powerful teaching tool for today's

ethical standards that is broadly applicable to a variety of modern parallels. Professor

Lupin serves as the example of a person who unfairly suffers discrimination. This issue,

a prominent concern in the modern world, is also explored by Rowling in her treatment of

giants, as well as in her consideration of classism and issues of one's bloodline or family lineage.

Although Rowling clearly draws on the ancient wolf and werewolf lore, her concept of the werewolf is greatly informed by later literature. An exploration of the historical literary development of the werewolf reveals the influence of the ancient model as well as the emergence of more modern motifs. The werewolf was first introduced into English literature by Marie de France around the end of the twelfth century. Her story "The Lady of the Bisclavaret" tells of a woman who discovers that her husband, a gallant knight and favorite of the king, suffers from a curse that causes him to become a werewolf.[127] At the time of transformation, the knight must disrobe and hide his clothes, for if he cannot find his clothing again, he would be trapped in his wolf form.[128] His horrified wife learns the location of the knight's hiding place and convinces her former suitor to steal his clothing at the time of his next transformation. After a year has passed, the king comes upon a wolf (the transformed knight) who befriends him and most of the court. He only exhibits vicious behavior toward his former wife and her new husband. Eventually, the two confess to their acts of treachery and are banished. The werewolf/knight finds his clothes and becomes human once more. This idea of a victimized, likable werewolf who finds contentment eventually is much more in line with Rowling's werewolf plotline than the ancient stories.[129]

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[127] Marie de France. "Lay of the Bisclavaret." (c.1170). A modern prose version entitled "The Lay of the Werewolf," is included in A Lycanthropy Reader: Werewolves in Western Culture. Charlotte F. Otten, ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1989).

[128] This detail is much like the Petronius' disrobing werewolf.

[129] In July 2008, the seventh and final novel of the *Harry Potter* series will be released. Closure will be provided for all major characters, including Lupin. Based upon the ongoing plot related to this character, it is likely that he will finally find a way to peacefully live with his own lycanthropic curse. This may include a romantic relationship with a witch called Tonks, which has been foreshadowed, and some level of social acceptance of his condition.

Marie de France's werewolf tale was highly influential, as two other medieval werewolf stories, both written in the thirteenth century, share similar plots. "Lai de Melion" is nearly identical to de France's story. "Arthur and Gorlagon" features a king (instead of a knight) who is a werewolf. Like Marie's protagonist, the king also has a treacherous wife. Her punishment is far worse than banishment, though, for she is forced to carry her lover's severed head in front of her, kissing it endlessly.[130]

The best known of all the medieval werewolf narratives is probably *Guillaume de Palerne,* an Old French romance written at the end of the twelfth century. [131] Widely popular in 1350, it was translated into Middle English alliterative verse, and in 1832 a modern English prose version was published. It is the fictional account of a benevolent werewolf named Alphonse. This may be the first account of an entirely benevolent werewolf, a character type echoed in Rowling's series. In the story, a Spanish prince falls victim to his evil stepmother's spell and endures many dangerous adventures in wolf form. He even protects William and Melior, a royal couple. In the end, Alphonse becomes human again (permanently) and William is crowned Roman Emperor. Although Rowling's Werewolf seems destined for a happy ending of some kind, it is doubtful that he will shed his lycanthropic curse entirely, as Alphonse does.

The popularity of the literary werewolf dramatically decreased after the medieval period. It was not until the nineteenth century that the popularity of the werewolf motif returned. *The Albigenses,* Charles Maturin's last Gothic novel, was written in 1824 and

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[130] Frost, The Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature 53.
[131] Guillaume de Palerne, translated into Middle English c. 1350. Also known as William and the Werewolf. The modern version is William of Palerne. W.W. Skeat, ed. (London: Early English Text Society, 1867).

marked a major, renewed interest in the werewolf.[132] The story emphasizes the

internalization of the wolf's nature. The werewolf character claims that his wolf fangs

and heart are really within. This perspective of the internal suffering (and viciousness) of

the werewolf seems to use the werewolf to represent every man's internal beast or dark

side. While Rowling's werewolf does suffer internally, his beastly side never harms

anyone and is therefore not much of a dark side. He manages to remain benign no matter

what his form.

A variety of werewolf tales featuring a severed limb that changes from wolf to

human form, thus revealing the presence of werewolves in a community, were written in

the nineteenth century.[133] Sutherland Menzies's "Hugues the Wer-Wolf: A Kentish

Legend of the Middle Ages" was first printed in1838.[134] The underlying theme of this

tale emphasizes the suffering of a social outcast and it may be the first overt use of the

werewolf to symbolize the community outsider in literature. As previously mentioned,

Rowling's werewolf serves the same function. Rowling draws from this particular

symbolism, using Lupin to represent similar social discrimination.

Werewolf literature remained popular throughout the nineteenth century and

appeared with numerous, interesting variations. The alluring female werewolf was

introduced in 1839,[135] and she becomes so because of a Faustian bargain, which is

another innovation in werewolf stories during this time. It has since become a common

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[132] Charles Maturin. The Albigenses: A Romance. (London: Hurst & Robinson, 1824). Reprint; NY: Arno Press, 1974.
[133] "The Wehr Wolf: A Legend of the Limousin" is included in Richard Thomson's three volume collection, Tales of an Antiquary. (London: Colburn, 1828) Vol. I. "The Severed Arm," written in 1820 is found in Peter Haining's Tales of Superstition (London: Severn House, 1987).
[134] Sutherland Menzie. "Hugues, the Wer-Wolf." The Court Magazine and Monthly Critic (Sep. 1838). Reprinted in Book of the Werewolf, edited b y Brian J. Frost. (London: Sphere Books, 1973).
[135] Frederick Marryat. "The Werewolf." The Phantom Ship. 1839. Reprinted in Douglas Hill's Way of the Werewolf. London: Panther, 1966.

element of modern werewolf literature.[136] Beginning in 1860, werewolf tales were often

told from a psychological perspective. Emile Erckman and Alexandre Chatrian wrote the

first of these psychological werewolf thrillers, emphasizing both the physical and mental

affliction of the sympathetic werewolf. This story, and many of those that followed,

found a cure or end to lycanthropic madness. Although Rowling does not cure her

werewolf, she draws from this tradition in her creation of a sympathetic character and her

use of a potion that suppresses his monthly transformations. Problems arise, however,

when he forgets to take his potion.

Victorian supernatural fiction often explored the idea of a fine, upstanding person

who is transformed into a vicious, brutal monster. Such characters did not always

become werewolves. The most famous such story may be Robert Louis Stevenson's

novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.[137] Brian J. Frost notes that although

Edward Hyde is not a werewolf, he shares much in common with the typical lycanthrope.

The dark side of a dual personality, Hyde is squatty, hairy and dangerous. "He may not

physically resemble a werewolf, but none-the-less, the Mark of the Beast is indelibly

stamped upon his face."[138]   In Stevenson's story, a drug based potion causes the

transformation from mild mannered doctor to violent monster, whereas in Rowling's

story, it is a potion that enables Professor Lupin to maintain his gentler, human form.

Stevenson further explored the idea of the dual self or beast within, with an actual

werewolf story, too.   In "Olalla," Stevenson spins a mystery involving a strange family

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[136] George W.M. Reynolds. Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf. Serialiazed in Reynolds's Miscellany (Nov. 6, 1846-July 24, 1847). Book versions: London: Dick's English Novels, c. 1857. New York: Dover Press, 1975. Alexander Dumas. The Wolf-Leader. (Paris: Cadot, 1857) as Le Meneur des Loups. Philadelphia: Prime Press, 1950.

[137] Robert Louis Stevenson. The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. (London: Longmans, Green, 1886).

[138] Frost, The Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature 73.

eventually revealed to be afflicted by a kind of hereditary lycanthropy that goes back for

many generations.[139] By this time, all of the now familiar aspects of the werewolf tale

had been introduced, "and for the next few decades there was an extensive repetition of

plot devices and even a lingering impulse toward Gothicism."[140] Some werewolf tales

from this period were Christian moralistic stories in which afflicted werewolves were

cured by exorcisms or miracles, but the major story elements remained the same.[141]

In the 1950s, most werewolves had changed from supernatural monsters who

dwelled in rural settings to urban hunters stalking contemporary city streets. The most

famous example of a werewolf in this modern setting is Frank Robinson's "The Night

Shift."[142] Rowling, too, opts to place her werewolf in a contemporary setting. Although

Hogwarts is a fantastic invention of the imagination, it is part of a magical world that

coexists simultaneously with contemporary society. This makes the series seem more

realistic. While authors like Robinson rejuvenated the werewolf motif with a

contemporary setting, which added to the fright of the story, Rowling's choice enables

the reader to relate better to and sympathize with her character.[143]

In recent years (the 1990s), paranormal romance novels, primarily targeting

female readers, emerged as a new subcategory of popular fiction. Such love stories

feature supernatural beings, like vampires and werewolves, who are usually male. These

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[139] Stevenson, "Olalla." <u>Court and Society Review</u> (Christmas 1885). Reprinted in <u>The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables</u>. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1887).
[140] Frost, <u>The Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature</u> 76.
[141] R.H. Benson. "Father Meuron's Tale." <u>A Mirror of Shalott</u>. (London: Pitman, 1907). Sir Arthur Gray's "The Necromancer" (1910) is found in <u>100 Creepy Little Stories</u>, edited by Stefan R. Dziemianowicz, Robert Weinberg and Martin H. Greenberg. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1994).
[142] Frank Robinson. "The Night Shift." <u>Fantasy Magazine</u> (Feb./Mar. 1953). Reprinted in <u>Fantastic Chicago</u>, edited by Martin H. Greenberg. (Chicon V, 1991).
[143] An exception to the popular use of the urban, contemporary setting furing the 1950s is J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy world, which is believably historic rather than contemporary. Known as Middle-Earth, this place was plagued by a number of monsters, including a version of werewolves the author called wargs. Tolkien, <u>The Lord of the Rings</u>. 3 volumes. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954-55).

characters are often depicted as "misunderstood outsiders who regard their ability…as an asset rather than a curse." They are irresistible to the heroines who find their dangerous nature to be powerfully alluring.[144] Other such novels feature tormented protagonists who are reluctant to accept their nature. These stories are much more romance than horror.[145] Rowling, too, treats her werewolf protagonist as the unlikely object of a woman's affection. A witch called Tonks pines away for Remus Lupin throughout Rowling's series.

Since the late twentieth century, the number of children's books about werewolves (and other monsters) has grown significantly.[146] Many of these novels take place at summer camps, forested areas and seemingly normal suburban neighborhoods.[147] Novels targeting the young adult crowd also feature werewolves. These books seem to draw on the "fears and anxieties of modern teenage life."[148] Rowling addresses the similar fears of her largely preteen and young adult readers. Aside from serving as a character through which Rowling explores the idea of discrimination, Professor Lupin, as a social outcast, represents a common concern of the young: acceptance. The "in crowd" of any scene, school or otherwise, is always relatively small in reference to the larger population. Many readers can relate to Lupin's social isolation and rejection. Rowling's

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[144] Frost, 230. One example is: Susan Krinard. Prince of Wolves. (New York:Bantam, 1994).

[145] Connie Flynn. Shadow on the Moon. (New York: Topaz, 1997) and Shadow of the Wolf. (New York: Topaz, 1998).

[146] Frost, 233.

[147] R.L. Stine wrote numerous werewolf stories for his popular pre-teen thriller series, *Goosebumps.* Some titles include: The Werewolf of Fever Swamp (New York: Scholastic, 1993), Werewolf Skin (New York: Scholastic, 1997) and Full Moon Fever (New York: Scholastic, 1999). Works by other authors include: Debra Doyle and James D. Macdonald. Bad Blood. (New York: Berkley Books, 1993), W.R. Philbrick. "Werewolf Chronicles" trilogy: Night Creature (New York: Scholastic, 1996), Children of the Wolf (New York: Scholastic, 1996) and The Wereing (New York: Scholastic, 1996). Pete Johnson. My Friend's a Werewolf. (New York: Dell Yearling, 1997).

[148] Frost, 237. John Peel. Dances With Werewolves. (New York: Archway, 1995). Patricia Windsor. The Blooding. (New York: Scholastic, 1996). Annette Curtis Klause. Blood and Chocolate. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1997).

werewolf is an amalgamation of bits and pieces of werewolf myth and literature throughout history. Beginning with his name and the obvious Classical associations, Rowling is inspired by the literary traditions of many periods.

The character of Rubius Hagrid, who appears in every book in the Harry Potter series, is an example of yet another way that Rowling uses mythical references to highlight social and moral ills. Hagrid is both the groundskeeper and Professor of Care of Magical Creatures classes at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Hagrid does not have a mythical name, although the sound of his name (and his mother's) does recall Norse mythology. It is his appearance, instead, that has roots in mythology. Hagrid is both the groundskeeper and Professor of Care of Magical Creatures classes at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Hagrid inherits his enormous stature from his mother, the fierce giantess Fridwulfa.

Giants have a long history in the world of mythology. The first giants may have been those of Greek mythology, who fought the Olympian gods. They were eventually defeated. Another famous race of giants in Greek mythology are the Cyclopes. One famous Cyclops, Polyphemos, appears in Homer's *Odyssey.* Odysseus outsmarts and tricks him into becoming intoxicated. Odysseus is then able to escape from becoming the giant's meal:

> But after he had briskly done all his chores and finished,
> Again he snatched up two men and prepared them for dinner…
> …and I gave him the gleaming wine again. Three times
> I brought it to him and gave it to him, three times he recklessly
> drained it, but when the wine had got into the brains of the Cyclops,
> …He spoke and slumped away and fell on his back, and lay there
> with his thick neck crooked over on one side, and sleep who subdues all
> came on and captured him, and the wine gurgled up from his gullet
> with gobs of human meat. This was drunken vomiting.
> Then I shoved the beam underneath a deep bed of cinders,

> Waiting for it to heat, and I spoke to all my companions,
> …So seizing the fire-point-hardened timber we twirled it
> in his eye, and the blood boiled around the hot point, so that
> the blast and scorch of the burning ball singed all his eyebrows
> and eyelids, and the fire made the roots of his eyes crackle.[149]

Cyclopes, like all the giants of myth, represent uncivilized living and mindless brutality:

> From there, grieving still at heart, we sailed on further
> Along, and reached the country of the lawless outrageous
> Cyclopes who, putting all their trust in the immortal
> Gods, neither plow with their hands nor plant anything,
> But all grows for them without seed planting, without cultivation,
> Wheat and barley and also the grapevines, which yield for them
> Wine of strength, and it is Zeus' rain that waters it for them.
> These people have no institutions, no meetings for counsels;
> Rather they make their habitations in caverns hollowed
> Among the peaks of the high mountains, and each one is the law
> For his own wives and children, and cares nothing about the others.[150]

Hesiod tells of three Cyclopes called Thunderer, Lightener, and Whitebolt, who crafted Zeus' thunderbolt. Although they were not as vicious or violent as Homer's Polyphemos, Hesiod's Cyclopes are fearsome. He describes them as god-like in strength and forcefulness.[151] His description of the other races of giants (Sons of Earth) portrays them as more monstrous and deadly.

The battle of the giants against the gods was one of the most popular myths in Greece. Although specific gods and episodes vary with every writer, they all seem to represent the fight of civilization (as symbolized by the gods) against barbarism (symbolized by the giants). Apollodorus' detailed account of the battle describes the giant Porphyrion's attempt to rape Hera:

> In the course of the fighting; Porphyrion launched an attack against Heracles and Hera. But when Zeus inspired him with a lust for Hera, and when he tore her clothing and tried to rape her, she cried for help; and Zeus struck the Giant with

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[149] Homer, <u>Odyseey</u> 9.343-390.
[150] Homer, <u>Odyssey</u> 9.105-115.
[151] Hesiod, <u>Theogony</u> Trans. M.L. West (N.Y.:Oxford University Press, 1988) 142-145 p.7.

his thunderbolt, and Heracles killed him with a shot from his bow.[152]
In the earliest Greek art, giants are depicted as warriors and wild men. Later, they are portrayed as monsters with legs like snakes. Famous sculptures of these giants exist on the Archaic Treasury of the Siphnians at Delphi and on the Hellenistic altar of Pergamum. In most art giants appear large and violent.

Mythical giants are often more than just big, they are monstrous with strange features such as an extra eye or snakes instead of legs. Other types of Classical giants included the Titans and the Hundred-Handers. Violent cannibalism is often associated with giants, such as Cronos, the Titan father of Zeus, who swallowed all of his children as soon as they were born.[153] The giants of fairytales and folklore are much the same, such as the man-eating giant in *Jack And The Beanstalk*.

Rowling draws from this giant lore but then dramatically reverses it. In the world of Harry Potter, too, giants have a well-earned reputation for violence. The History of Magic professor lectures the Hogwarts students on the bloody period of the Giant Wars. Giants are increasingly rare in the wizarding world, though, because they have turned their violence upon each other, and their numbers have dwindled because of it. Most wizards are prejudiced against giants in Harry's world, believing them to be stupid, murderous creatures that have little in common with humans. Hagrid, however, does not exhibit any of the vicious tendencies of giants. He is large and enjoys his drinking, much as the cyclops Polyphemos did in the *Odyssey*, but that is where the similarities end. Hagrid is civilized, although a bit rough around the edges. He is hospitable to guests, tends a thriving garden, and is something of a healer, tending to the emotional and

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[152] Apollodorus 1.6.2 p.34.
[153] Apollodorus 1.5.

physical wounds of others. His nurturing and sensitivity embody many of the traditional traits attributed to women and mothers. That connection is effectively communicated in his interactions with a dragon that he has lovingly raised, since Hagrid even refers to himself as the creature's "mommy."

Rowling's twist on the giants of mythology reveals a belief that perhaps the biggest man is one who exhibits some traditionally feminine characteristics. Hagrid is the first warm, nurturing presence Harry encounters after years of abuse at the hands of his aunt and uncle. He is also Harry's first friend. Rowling uses giants to explore the theme of unfairly judging others based upon their physical appearance or established stereotypes, just as she does with her treatment of werewolves and Professor Lupin's story. Hagrid is another means through which Rowling can illustrate the error in mindlessly believing stereotypes instead of judging others on their own merits, without discrimination. However, as Baker keenly points out, although Rowling takes pains to create a moral lesson cautioning against racial or cultural prejudice, she herself is guilty of creating a world that lacks real cultural diversity and is deeply European.[154] From the oil paintings, tapestries and Medieval architecture of Hogwarts to the language and trappings of witchcraft and wizardry, much of the setting reeks of Arthurian imagery.

Rowling also writes in a way that creates sweeping, stereotypical generalizations about the races of beings in her invented world. For example, she describes goblins as being greedy and unfriendly and she mockingly characterizes suburbanites through her depictions of the Dursleys and their cookie-cutter neighborhood. Perhaps this is Rowling's way of acknowledging that avoiding stereotyping altogether is virtually impossible, while still admonishing readers to try to refrain from a rush to judgment.

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[154] Baker, 45.

V. HEROES: THEN AND NOW

In Greek myths, heroes usually act in their own interest, for the benefit of themselves or perhaps their own families. They are brave, strong, and sometimes clever, but they are rarely selfless. There are exceptions, as some Greek heroes did act to benefit others, such as Heracles who undertook twelve labors and made the world safe for civilized man. Many Greek heroes, however, sought only their own glory and rewards. They sometimes gain assistance by actively charming, seducing, or winning the favor of people and gods, but the overall image of these heroes (especially when viewed through our contemporary lens) is that they often are, essentially, acting alone for their own benefit.

Of course, the individually motivated heroes of ancient Greek myth do not accurately reflect the real citizens of Greece. The Greeks believed in their social and civic obligations to their society. They had a strong sense of national identity which centered largely around the polis. They proudly carried out civic, religious and military duties. Ideally, the Greeks believed in acting in the best interest of their community. This is clear in the funeral oration of Pericles:

> …while in public life men gain preference because of their deserts, when anybody has a good reputation for anything: what matters is not rotation but merit. As for poverty, if a man is able to confer some benefit to the city, he is not prevented by the obscurity of his position.[155]

In Greek society, however, there are often different expectations for the gods and heroes than for mortal Greeks. For Rowling, the moral expectations are universal, applied equally to the powerful god-like wizards and the meeker students and *muggles*. It is the

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[155] Thucydides, <u>History II</u>. Trans. P.J. Rhodes. (Wiltshire, England: Aris & Phillips, 1988) 83. 37.1-2.

comparison of Rowling's heroes to ancient ones that is interesting.   When comparing

Harry Potter to heroes like Achilles, Jason and Odysseus, it becomes clear that he is more

communally oriented than these individually minded heroes. His story (or stories),

however, explores many of the same heroic issues as the stories of Greek heroes. Homer

raised questions about the responsibility of the hero and the hero's role in society.

Thousands of years later, Rowling continues the conversation. We can use Harry Potter

as a kind of mirror to reflect contemporary values, just as we can use heroes like Achilles

as a mirror to reflect Greek values.

The definitive literary source, in terms of age and fame, for traditional Greek

heroes is Homer's *Iliad.* The Trojan War epic is filled with legendary heroes such as

Priam, Hector, Paris, and Aeneas, who fight for Troy and Achilles, Ajax, Menelaus,

Agamemnon, Patroclus and Odysseus who fight for the Greeks. It is widely held that the

Iliad is a re-telling of stories handed down orally by the Greeks for many generations

before it was written down in the eighth century, B.C.E. As such, it is a window into the

image of the traditional Greek hero. As Cedric Whitman points out, "the earlier centuries

of Greek culture were dominated to a great degree by the vision of the heroic."[156]

Seth L. Schein, in his book *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction To Homer's Iliad,*

says that "Homer's attitude toward heroism can be seen in the very word *heros,*

which…in the *Iliad* signifies a warrior who lives and dies in the pursuit of honor and

glory."[157] Most of the *Iliad*'s heroes act in pursuit of honor and glory. They need to be

recognized. Achilles wants to be recognized as the best warrior (and will not fight when

he feels slighted or insulted). When Agamemnon dishonors Achilles by taking his share

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[156] Whitman, <u>The Heroic Paradox</u>. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) 19.
[157] Schein, <u>The Mortal Hero</u>. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984) 69.

of the spoils, Achilles vows to refuse to fight:

> ...by this staff I swear
> A great oath that surely someday a desperate need
> For Achilles shall come upon all the sons of Achaeans,
> Nor will you be able to help them at all, no matter
> How grieved you are, when man-killing Hector is cutting them
> Down by the dozen. Then, I say, you'll rend
> Your heart with wrath and remorse for failing to honor
> The best Achaean of all![158]

Gregory Nagy identifies the heart of this scene, saying, "The central grievance of

Achilles in the *Iliad* is that Agamemnon has dishonored him."[159]

Agamemnon, too, seeks recognition. He wants to be acknowledged as the leader

of the Greeks. He is willing to lose his best warrior, seemingly content (at first) to be

surrounded by those who treat him with the respect he feels he deserves:

> …Go on and run,
> If you feel the urge so strongly. I do not beg you
> To stay on my account. I've others here
> Who honor and respect me..[160]

Neither of these men acts in the best interest of the Greeks, at least not in this scene.

They are instead driven by their desire for glory and honor, at all costs. The pursuit of

honor and glory does not always exclude acting in the best interest of an ancient hero's

society. Often, while achieving honor on the battlefield, Iliadic heroes simultaneously

work in their society's favor. The key element is their motivation. They seem to be, first

and foremost, driven by their own desires.[161]

The Iliadic hero is marked by more than just his search for honor and glory. He is

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[158] Homer, Iliad. Trans. Ennis Rees. 1.278-285.
[159] Nagy, Gregory. The Best of the Achaeans. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 26.
[160] Homer, Iliad. 1.197-200.
[161] To be fair and clear, it should be noted that the Iliadic heroes are in a specific situation in which they are forced to fight in a foreign war. This certainly affects their motivation, too.

marked by death. This includes how he faces it, delivers it and eventually succumbs to it

himself. In *The Epic Hero*, Dean A. Miller states that "heroism, to the Greeks, was a

multifold concept, but one held together by the power laden *muthos* of death."[162] Death

is more than just an important theme in the *Iliad,* as Schein explains:

> In the world of the poem war is the medium of human existence and achievement;
> bravery and excellence in battle win honor and glory and thus endow life with
> meaning. Heroes affirm their greatness by the brilliance and efficiency with
> which they kill…"[163]

 Finkelberg further simplifies her description of the Iliadic hero:

> The Iliad proceeds from an idea of hero which is pure and simple: a hero is one
> who prizes honour and glory above life itself and dies on the battlefield in the
> prime of life.[164]

According to Whitman, the heroes themselves are significantly aware of their inevitable

death, for they possess a "desperate self knowledge" that they are mortal and therefore

"destined to die."[165] This awareness creates a part of what Whitman describes as the

heroic paradox. Many Greek heroes live their lives amidst the tension that exists

between their awareness of impending death and their "urge toward divinity." This urge,

which manifests itself in the hero's desire for greatness and glory, is the "motivation of

the heroic."[166] Although they are mortal, they can approach immortality by achieving

such honor that the knowledge of their heroic deeds will live on indefinitely.[167] Whitman

extends this desire for the immortal to the Greeks at large, saying, "The Greeks

constantly thought of themselves as striving for the immortal, striving for absolute status,

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[162] Miller, <u>The Epic Hero</u> (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) 5.
[163] Schein 68.
[164] Margalit Finkelberg. "Odysseus And The Genus 'Hero'." <u>Greece and Rome</u> 42 No.1 (Apr. 1995): 1-14, p.1.
[165] Whitman 22.
[166] Whitman 21-22.
[167] This legendary fame is also at work in Harry Potter's story. The tale of his survival and defeat of Lord Voldemort during his infancy is known by every witch and wizard in the wizarding world.

while on the other hand, we meet with very frequent admonitions against trying to be a god."[168] Whitman refers here to another inherent paradox in the messages of Greek heroic literature. All of this contradiction leads us to the essence of the hero's problem and the nature of his existence. Individualism was a "deciding force" in early Greek culture. This heroic mythology of ancient Greece was developing at the same time as the polis system was forming. It is interesting to note that while Greek culture placed increasing demands upon the obligations of its people to society, the individualism of the hero emerges as a significant element in myth and literature. Achilles, while asking the gods for their divine support of his individual pursuit of honor, simultaneously turns his back on his commitment to the Greeks. This is the hero's dilemma: to fulfill himself in a world that expects acts for society, to seek godhead knowing all the while he is destined to perish. It is seemingly impossible and complex but can be simply understood as "the individual asserting himself against society, in a way that threatens to make him no longer relevant to it."[169] Ultimately, the heroic paradox is at its most rigid in the *Iliad*. The only way for the hero to reconcile his conflict between ties to society and his own "selfhood" was to "satisfy his heroic quest by the choice and assertion of his own death."[170]

Although society is often seen in contrast with the individual, other Greek literary works attempt to offer their heroes the hope of "livability."[171] The *Odyssey* is an early example of this. Unlike Achilles, who knows he must die heroically to achieve anything like divinity, Odysseus chooses his humanity over the actual immortality Kalypso offers him. He tells her that he is a proper-minded man, and as such he wants to go home to his

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[168] Whitman 23.
[169] Whitman 23-25.
[170] Whitman 28.
[171] Whitman 28.

family.[172] On the surface, it would seem that perhaps Odysseus has escaped the heroic

paradox so strongly represented in the *Iliad*. After all, he seems much more clearly

decided than the divided Achilles. Not so, says Whitman, however. He is tempted by his

encounters with immortality and most especially by the knowledge and adventure these

encounters bring. Kalypso offers immortality and the Sirens offer knowledge (especially

tempting to one as curious as Odysseus). Ultimately, though, Odysseus resolves the

paradox of the divine vs. the human by "choosing the human and rejecting the divine."

Unlike Achilles, who chooses his own early death, as he views a long life ending in old

age as an end that is beneath a hero like himself, one so close to the gods, Odysseus is

invited by Tieresias to foresee his own death, and he chooses it as a natural end to a long

life that is both dignified and suitable for himself.[173] The Kalypso theme shares much in

common with the scene of the Sirens. In both cases, the immortal (feminine) creatures

tempt Odysseus to forget his journey home, and in both cases Odysseus overcomes the

temptations.

Finkelberg acknowledges that Odyseeus differs distinctly from the heroes of the

Iliad. She explains the difference as being that the Iliadic hero "sets an example of how

one ought to die," but "Odysseus' life-experience demonstrates how one ought to live."

She explains that while the *Iliad*'s version of heroism amounts to a "readiness to meet

death on the battlefield," the *Odyssey's* hero is "one who is prepared to go through life

enduring toil and suffering."[174] Viewing the *Odyssey* through this lens, it becomes clear

that the heroic message of the Odyssey is more life-affirming and more "earthy" and

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[172] Homer, <u>Odyssey</u> 5.215-220.
[173] Whitman 30.
[174] Finkelberg 12.

human than the heroic message of the *Iliad*.[175] Finkelberg seems to suggest that this indicates a progressive development in the idea of the hero, as if it came about in clearly definable stages. It is perhaps more likely that the two works simply represent contemporary alternatives and explorations of the heroic.

Similarities remain between Odysseus and Iliadic heroes. Odysseus, too, finds himself temporarily in conflict with society. Although he eventually returns to Ithaca and his family to resume his responsibilities, he is not always in a hurry to do so. His infamous curiosity leads to many of the episodes which threaten his return. His curiosity lead him to risk death by listening to the Sirens' song. Odysseus does not always act in the best interest of men, either. It is his curiosity and desire to receive guest gifts that leads him and his men into the cyclops' dwelling.[176] The result is the death of several of his crew.[177]

Odysseus differs significantly from more traditional heroes of the *Iliad* in other ways, too. Although marked by individualism and a desire for personal gain or satisfaction, Odysseus exhibits different specific heroic traits than someone like Achilles. While Iliadic heroes are generally the fiercest and most highly skilled in battle, Odysseus is skilled in craftiness and wile, instead. Odysseus is admirable and successful because of his "deception" and ingenious trickery.[178] In fact, Odysseus is "unequalled in his skillful use of deception."[179] Odysseus is described as clever and wily in the *Iliad,* too, but it is in the *Odyssey* that he best reveals his unique heroic excellence. The Odysseus of the

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[175] Finkelberg 10.

[176] Homer, <u>Odyssey</u> 9.223.

[177] This is not to say that Odysseus does not care for his men or act in their best interest. He often does, but the times he risks everything for his individual impulses are significant, as they contribute to the overall impression of Odysseus as a distinctly individual hero.

[178] W.P. Stanford, "Astute Hero and Ingenious Poet: Odysseus and Homer." <u>The Yearbook of English Studies</u> 12 (1982): 1-12.

[179] Michael J. Bennett. <u>Belted Heroes and Bound Women</u>. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997) 97.

Odyssey is a great individual. He alone returns home. He stands out from the group just

a much as Achilles. The difference is that Achilles seeks to be set apart from the group,

and Odysseus does not.

Although the Homeric heroes are by far the most well-known, it is important to

look beyond them to formulate a fuller comparison for the topic of ancient Greek mythic

heroes and how they compare to Rowling's own hero. Jason is another interesting

example of a hero who possesses some of the traditional aspects of a Greek hero, but who

also exists as distinct from other heroes.

Our best literary source for the story of Jason is Apollonius of Rhodes' *The

Voyage of Argo*, or the *Argonautica.* The Hellenistic epic poem tells of Jason's famous

quest for the Golden Fleece, and Apollonius' version is the only full remaining account

of Jason's voyage. Perhaps more so than any other Greek hero, Jason seems to be a

deeply flawed, painfully human character who is not overtly skilled at anything apparent,

yet somehow manages to succeed fantastically in his quest. He is in the company of a

larger-than-life crew of impressive heroes, such as semi-divine Orpheus, Erytus and

Echion (sons of Hermes) and the mighty Heracles, yet somehow emerges as their leader.

Surrounded by such great and capable heroes, Jason seems all the more lacking in skill

and honor. Scholars have noted that Jason seems to be traditionally represented as a kind

of "helpless" character. They cite his indecisiveness, his dependence upon the help of

women and his overall lack of motivation and skill.[180] As R.L. Hunter writes, "Jason is

marked by the absence of extraordinary intelligence and the supernatural skills enjoyed

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[180] Moses Hadas. "The tradition of a Feeble Jason." Classical Philology 31 No.2 (Apr. 1936): 166-168.
 J.F. Carspecken. "Apollonius Rhodius and the Homeric Epic." YCS 13 (1952) 33-143.
R.L. Hunter. "Short on Heroics: Jason in the Argonautica." The Classical Quarterly. 38 No.2 (1988) 436-453.

by some of the most prominent Argonauts."[181]

James J. Clauss disagrees with the assessment that Jason is lacking in skill. Clauss argues that although Jason does not possess the more traditionally recognized skills of heroes like those of his crew, he possesses his own distinctly nontraditional talents which include, "the ability to attract women, to take care of the details of running an expedition, and to make the best of bad situations through skillful crisis management."[182] It is his ability to attract women that has earned him the label of erotic hero. Without the magical aid of the infatuated sorceress, Medea, Jason would have failed early in his quest and died. Strangely, instead of being loyal and grateful to his powerful ally, he ultimately betrays her.[183]

Jason is depicted as a womanizer by other writers than just Apollonius of Rhodes. Powerful women become enamored of him, and he uses their favor for his own gain. Apollodorus describes how Jason takes Hypsipyle, Queen of the Isle of Lemnos, as his lover. She bears him two sons. Medea's passionate love for Jason is obvious in *Argonautica*. She was a sorceress and a princess, and her desire for Jason led her to betray her own father and aid Jason with magic in his attainment of the fleece. Afterward, she became his wife, but he betrayed her by choosing a new wife.

Claus suggests that Apollonius "forges a new kind of hero within the context of a recurrent thematic contrast between the man of skill and the man of strength."[184] Although he is unlike more traditional heroes in many ways, Jason does share in their staunch individualism and self-interested pursuits. It isn't glory he seeks, like the heroes

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[181] Hunter 441.
[182] James J. Clauss. The Best of The Argonauts. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 210.
[183] Apollonius of Rhodes. The Voyage of Argo. Trans. E.V. Rieu. (New York: Penguin, 1959) Book 3.
[184] Claus 3.

of the *Iliad*. Unlike Odysseus, Jason does not desire adventure, nor does he exhibit a

strong loyalty and love of wife and family. Jason wants the Golden Fleece. Although he

does win the favor and help of others, he does so manipulatively. He uses his good looks

to seduce women into helping him achieve his own goals. Jason goes through various

ordeals to obtain the Golden Fleece, but he does so in order to claim his rightful

inheritance, not to help society or even his fellow Argonauts. He is clearly not a

communally minded humanitarian. Although he did obtain the Golden Fleece, Jason's

return to Greece was not what he had hoped. The "king," Pelias, had caused the death of

Jason's father, and his mother had died of grief. Once again, Jason relies on Medea's

help, as she tricks Pelias' daughters into killing their own father. Later, instead of

devoting himself to Medea, Jason seekst a profitable alliance by marrying the daughter of

the King of Corinth. Medea is hurt and angered by Jason's betrayal and in a final act of

vengeance, she murders Jason's bride-to-be just before she murders her own sons who

had been fathered by Jason. Although not an appealing image for a hero of today, Jason

was one of many manifestations of the heroic in ancient Greece. The end with which he

is met suggests, however, that there is much about him that is not to be admired (then or

now). Regardless of specific skills or tasks, to be a great Greek hero was to be an

individualist. Throughout their literature, the Greeks carried out an ongoing debate of

what makes *arete*, or heroic excellence, and in each case the heroes seem to have struck a

different balance between their own desires and their obligations to society. In every

case, however, their individualism and their own desires were the major motivation for

their actions. In this way, Harry Potter most significantly differs. The authors of the

ancient stories, Homer, Apollonius and the Greeks themselves, began a broad and

fascinating discussion about the definition and responsibilities of a hero. Rowling, although arriving at different conclusions, carries on the discussion thousands of years later. In so doing, she continues the tradition of using literature to explore the nature of *arête*.

Aside from being the protagonist of Rowling's adventurous novels, Harry Potter is set up by the author as a hero. He shares many of the traditional heroic traits of the ancient mythic heroes. Like so many Greek heroes, Harry bears a heroic token, the lightening bolt shaped scar on his forehead. He is also marked as a hero by his special lineage. Although his mother was a *muggle,* both of his parents were accomplished wizards who were remarkably good and brave. Harry has specific attributes, too, such as his glasses and unruly hair. He obtains special weapons that empower his heroic deeds, too. Most obviously, he has a wand, but every child at Hogwarts has one of those. Throughout the series he acquires unique magical objects such as an invisibility cloak and the Marauders' Map (a map that reveals where everyone is located at any given time at Hogwarts).

G.S. Kirk identifies the most common episodic traits of Greek heroic mythology, and Harry Potter share many of these major thematic elements.[185] Many heroic myths feature heroes who are enclosed or imprisoned (often in a chest, jar or tomb). Harry was kept in a cupboard under the stairs at his aunt and uncle's home. Greek heroes experience a variety of family stresses, one of which is displaced or murdered parents. Harry, of course, is orphaned because his parents were murdered. Greek heroes embark on great conquests and Harry is no different. He frequently fulfills difficult tasks and quests, as well as competes in dangerous contests such as Quidditch matches and the

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[185] Kirk 187-189.

Triwizard Tournament. Kirk identifies the main episodic trends of Greek mythology as including tricks, riddles and ingenious solutions to problems, transformations, the accidental killing of a relative or friend, and interaction with giants, monsters and snakes. Harry Potter's adventures include not one, but all of these events. Sharon Black has written that "Harry Potter, then, is a set of modern symbols for the processes and truths that have been represented by hero and journey symbols through the ages."[186]

Rowling has made Harry more than just the main character. She has made him a traditionally recognizable hero. Having done so, she is able to explore similar issues of heroism explored by the ancient Greeks. Her hero will face many of the same dilemmas as the ancient heroes of Greek myth, but he will handle them differently.

J.K. Rowling carries on the literary debate of what makes a hero, and in comparison to the heroes of Greek myth, she offers a distinctly different image of the heroic.[187] Harry Potter acts on behalf of the protection of society and is successful because of the support he receives from his own, smaller community of supporters.

Unlike the Iliadic heroes, Harry is not in search of glory or honor. He comes from a humble background and maintains his sincere humility throughout the series. He avoids and resents press coverage and limelight and avoids any overt attention. Although he has found himself making the winning point for his Quidditch team or selected to be a TriWizard Tournament champion, these honors are thrust upon him. He does not seek them out, in fact he does not try out for the Quidditch Team nor does he submit his name

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[186] Sharon Black, "The Magic of Harry Potter: Symbols and Heroes of Fantasy," Children's Literature in Education 34 (Sept. 2003) 237-247, 244. Black examines the symbolic appeal of the series in terms of the writings of Bruno Bettelheim and Joseph Campbell.

[187] Edmund M. Kern might disagree with the suggestion that Harry is a new hero. In his book, The Wisdom of Harry Potter: What Our Favorite Hero tEaches Us About Moral Choices, Kern explores how Harry is a kind of Stoic hero, exemplifying Stoic virtues like endurance, solidarity, perseverance and sacrifice.

into the Goblet of Fire to be considered a tournament Champion.

Often Harry finds himself to be misunderstood and the victim of malicious gossip or circumstantial misunderstandings that render him widely unpopular among the students at Hogwarts. Harry does not try to set the record straight or to regain the good name and reputation he previously possessed. His reputation is of little concern to him at all. He is not motivated by pride.

Also unlike the heroes of the *Iliad,* Harry's identity as a hero is not based on his skill as a warrior. Death is a major theme throughout Rowling's novels, but Harry is no killer. In the six published books of the projected seven book series, Harry has not killed anyone. In fact, his earliest fame in the wizarding world was earned just by living. After Voldemort tried and failed to kill the infant Harry, he was known as The Boy Who Lived.

All of the Greek heroes turn out to possess some outstanding skill. Harry does not. He is brave, but there are others that are equally brave. He is not especially strong or deadly, like Achilles. He is not remarkably handsome. In fact, such a term is never applied to Harry. He is not a good manipulator or trickster, like Odysseus, nor is he a romantic charmer like Jason. He has admirable abilities, yes, but he is not idealized to perfection in regard to any of them. What is significant about Harry is his selfless motivation, which is shared by his friends, but perhaps not to the extent Harry feels it. Harry's heroic actions are primarily motivated by selfless concern to protect or save others. Unlike the Greek heroes, Harry does not stand to gain any particular reward. There is no chance at immortality, no return to kingdom and loving royal family, no Golden Fleece. Essentially, Harry emerges as a hero who wants nothing for himself, but peace and safety for the community.

Even though, like so many Greek heroes, Harry seems to have everything he needs to succeed in completing his various trials, it still isn't enough to defeat the enemy. He cannot do it completely alone. Yes, he is good, clever, powerful and talented. He is even gifted, like so many ancient heroes before him, with magical tools and objects, such as the invisibility cloak, enchanted marauder's map, magic wand, and souped-up broom. He still needs his friends. Harry Potter does not complete a single trial, in any book, solely by his own actions and abilities. His friends always contribute significantly to his success. Often his friends assist him in getting almost to the end of a trial, where Harry then finds himself finishing it alone, but he never would have made it even that far without much assistance. Harry is what we might call a Community Hero. His motivations, unlike those of most Greek heroes, are community minded, with the best interest of society being his greater concern. Harry's actions always benefit the wizarding community he seeks to protect, as he repeatedly fights to prevent the murderous Lord Voldemort from regaining power and destroying everything that is good in the magical world. In *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*, Harry argues with Ron and Hermione about trying to get to the Sorcerer's Stone before it is stolen. They warn him that he could be expelled, but Harry is concerned about larger consequences:

"If Snape gets hold of the Stone, Voldemort's coming back...There won't be any Hogwarts to get expelled from… He'll flatten it, or turn it into a school for the Dark Arts! Losing points doesn't matter anymore, can't you see? D'you think he'll leave you and your families alone if Gryffindor wins the house cup? If I get caught before I can get to the Stone, well, I'll have to go back to the Dursleys and wait for Voldemort to find me there, it's only dying a bit later than I would have, because I'm never going over to the Dark Side! I'm going through that trap door tonight and nothing you two say is going to stop me! Voldemort killed my parents, remember?"[188]

This scene reveals Harry to be someone who has a much broader perspective than

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[188] Rowling, <u>Sorcerer's</u> 270.

his friends. They are initially concerned with Harry's risk of school punishment. Harry, however, sees the larger picture and the dangers to the community. Although his reference to the death of his parents could be interpreted as a sign that Harry is driven by vengeance, it is clearly only a portion of his motivation. Harry wants to save Hogwarts and the entire community from Voldemort. He is willing to risk expulsion and even death in order to prevent the Dark Lord from regaining his former power. Harry specifically mentions concern for the safety of his friends and even their families, whom he does not even know at this point in the series. This desire to protect others, even those he does not know, marks him as a Community Hero.

In *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry risks his life to clear Hagrid's name. Harry, accompanied by Ron, enters the Forbidden Forest at night (something students are cautioned never to do). There they encounter a colony of man-eating giant spiders. When asked why they have come, Harry answers, "Hagrid's in trouble."[189] After this incident, Harry realizes that he must discover the truth in order to find the Chamber of Secrets and to prevent the death of Hogwarts' staff and students. Initially, Harry takes risks in order to prove that Hagrid did not commit the heinous acts at Hogwarts. Later, Harry's focus expands beyond saving Hagrid to saving all of Hogwarts.

In *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry and Hermione go to great lengths, including traveling back in time, in order to save both Buckbeak the hippogriff and Sirius Black from certain execution. Their efforts are completely selfless, as they are motivated by the desire to "save two innocent lives."[190]

Throughout *Harry Potter and The Goblet Of Fire*, Harry makes selfless choices.

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[189] Rowling, Chamber 277.
[190] Rowling, Prisoner 396-415.

At the end of the third and final trial of the Triwizard Tournament, Harry makes an interesting decision. Rather than taking the cup for himself and winning the tournament, Harry tells Cedric to take it. Cedric is the only other competitor from Hogwarts and is just behind Harry in the maze. Cedric refuses and tells Harry to take it. Finally, Harry suggests they both take it. After imagining the glory of winning it alone, Harry tells Cedric, "We'll take it at the same time. It's still a Hogwarts victory. We'll tie for it." Cedric agrees and the two grab the cup simultaneously.[191] Harry chooses to view the last trial of the tournament as a way to win for the whole school, rather than individually. He turns away from his fantasy of individual glory, choosing a community win instead. Roni Natov discusses how Rowling uses a magical world to illustrate real-life moral lessons in her essay "Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of Ordinary." Natov explains how this plotline in particular establishes a moral code and questions what it means to win. Natov notes that "Harry saves his rivals, along with his friends," and in so doing he rejects "either/or policy," establishing "a new paradigm of sharing, building community, and inclusiveness."[192] Perhaps it is this too-good-to-be-true quality, which seems more unrealistic than the magic wands and flying broomsticks, that is responsible for the series' categorization as children's literature. As idealistic as this kind of hero is, he may appeal most to the naïve reader. Such selflessness appears in stark contrast against the reality of contemporary living.

Later in the book, Dumbledore mentions Harry's altruism as he describes the way Harry risked his life to keep his promise to a dying Cedric, by bringing his body back to Hogwarts while fending off attacks from Voldemort and several other Death Eaters:

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[191] Rowling, Goblet 634.
[192] Roni Natov, "Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of the Ordinary," The Lion and the Unicorn 25 (Apr. 2001): 310-327, 327.

"Harry Potter managed to escape Lord Voldemort," said Dumbledore. "He risked his own life to return Cedric's body to Hogwarts. He showed, in every respect, the sort of bravery that few wizards have shown in facing Lord Voldemort, and for this, I honor him."[193]

Harry's success in achieving what is best for the community is also communal in nature, as he relies heavily on the talents, ethics, wit and actions of his friends. With their help Harry displays the heroics that make him famous, both within the story as well as in the minds of his millions of readers.

Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone sets the precedent for Harry's friends helping him succeed. When he discusses his plans to set out on a dangerous mission, it becomes clear that his friends will not allow him to go alone. They insist that the three of them seek the stone together, surprising Harry.

"All – all three of us?"
"Oh come off it, you don't think we'd let you go alone?"
"Of course not," said Hermione briskly. "How do you think you'd get the stone without us? I'd better go and look through my books, there might be some useful…"[194]

This isn't just a nice gesture on the part of Harry's friends. He needs them and they know it. Without them, Harry would still be a selfless, courageous boy whose attempts and intentions are heroic, but he would fail without assistance, in every story. In this first book, Harry wouldn't even have made it out of his dormitory, let alone through the trap door to the location of the Sorcerer's Stone, without help. Neville Longbottom, afraid that the whole House of Gryffindor will be punished if Harry is caught in the halls after curfew, tries to stop him. Hermione apologetically renders Neville immobile with a spell.[195]

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[193] Rowling 722-723.
[194] Rowling, Sorcerer's 271.
[195] Rowling 273.

It is Hermione's studious dedication to memorizing spells and charms that stop

Neville from preventing their exit. It takes Hermione to play the flute to keep the three

headed dog sleeping.[196] Ron holds the great trap door open so that Harry can drop

through it in an effort to prevent the theft of the Sorcerer's Stone. Later, Hermione's

attentiveness in Herbology class pays off as she is the only one to identify the strangling

plant that grabs them all as Devil's Snare. Luckily, she remembers that light kills the

deadly plant and again comes to the rescue with her wand. Next, it requires the effort of

all three friends in order to chase and corner the flying key within the third chamber. Ron

becomes the hero in another chamber, his chess skills and bravery enable him to win a

life-sized enchanted chess game and to ensure that both Hermione and Harry make it

across the board to press on into the next chamber. Hermione's intellect continues to

assist Harry in his mission, as she logically solves the riddle of the next chamber and

quickly determines which potion will safely allow Harry to pass through the blue flames

into the final chamber. As there is only enough of the potion for one person to go

through the blue flame, Harry drinks it and travels on alone. Harry then relies on his own

intelligence, bravery, and noble intentions to face and outsmart Professor Quirrel's

attempts to steal the stone, but in the end, Professor Dumbledore, alerted by an owl sent

by Ron and Hermione, comes to Harry's aid. Clearly, Harry is a hero who does not act

alone. Sometimes he finds himself alone for a short while, but he is always forearmed

with the knowledge and talents of his friends during scenes of individual bravery, and

they quickly rejoin him afterward. Indeed, he would never reach these crucial

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[196] Ernelle Fife, "Wise warriors in Tolkien, Lewis and Rowling," <u>Mythlore</u> 25 (Fall/Winter 2006): 147-162. Fife cautions us against overlooking the presence of female "wise warriors" or dismissing them as minor characters or sidekicks. She identifies many such warriors in the series including Hermione Granger, Mrs. Molly Weasley, Ginny Weasley, Minerva McGonogall and Mrs. Arabella Figg.

confrontations with villains without the help of his friends.[197]

Harry's heavy reliance upon the support of his friends offers a new model of a hero. Many heroes receive occasional assistance, and some have regular help from sidekicks, magical tools, or acts of the gods. There are few heroes, however, who are LARGELY successful because of the assistance they receive. The heroes of most of today's stories as they appear in film and fictional literature predominantly overcome obstacles and accomplish goals on their own.[198]

In the second book, *Harry Potter And The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry is aided continually by his devoted friends. Hermione researches and makes the very complicated polyjuice potion that enables Ron and Harry to disguise themselves as Draco Malfoy's cronies, Crabbe and Goyle. In disguise, they converse with Malfoy in order to find out what he knows about the mysterious happenings at Hogwarts involving the chamber of secrets. Harry needS Ron, for Crabbe and Goyle are never apart, and Harry alone in disguise would seem suspicious. Later, after Hermione has been petrified by the monster roaming the halls of Hogwarts, Harry discovers an essential bit of information clutched in her stiff hand. This bit of research provides Harry with crucial information as to the identity of the monster and the location of its hidden chamber. Without Hermione's findings, Harry would not have been able to locate the basilisk or Lord Voldemort's dangerous persona, Tom Riddle. During the dangerous confrontation between Harry and Tom Riddle and his beast, Dumbledore sends aid to Harry in the form of his hat and his pet phoenix. The hat holds a sword and the phoenix's tears heal Harry's basilisk-inflicted

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[197] Rowling, Sorcerer's 276-286.

[198] There are countless contemporary, albeit exaggerated examples of such individual heroes for children including all Marvel comic book heroes from The Punisher to Superman. Modern and contemporary pop-cultural heroic film icons are good examples of individual heroes, from the mysterious gunslinger of westerns to virtually every action hero.

wound. Without this aid, Harry would have died heroically but failed to stop

Voldemort's killing spree. Again, it is the group's effort that saves the day.

Rowling makes it a point early on to impress upon her readers the importance of

friends. At the end of Harry's first school year at Hogwarts, Professor Dumbledore

formally rewards the many contributions of Harry and his friends at the House Cup

ceremony. The rest of the school watches in amazement as they see the individually

earned points of various Gryffindor students add up together to earn them the House Cup.

In this way Rowling highlights the role that Harry's friends play in his success and the

success of their house. At one point in the ceremony, Gryffindor House (which is

Harry's house) and Slytherin House are tied for the House Cup. Professor Dumbledore

had already awarded points to Harry, Hermione and Ron. Then he awards the last ten

points to Neville Longbottom for having the courage to stand up to his friends by

attempting to prevent them from breaking school rules and endangering themselves. It is

this last set of points that secures the House Cup for Gryffindor:

> Someone standing outside the Great Hall might well have thought some sort of
> explosion had taken place, so loud was the noise that erupted from the Gryffindor
> table. Harry, Ron, and Hermione stood up to yell and cheer as Neville, white with
> shock, disappeared under a pile of people hugging him. He had never won so
> much as a point for Gryffindor before…It was the best evening of Harry's life,
> better than winning at Quidditch, or Christmas, or knocking out mountain
> trolls…he would never, ever forget tonight.[199]

Indeed, Rowling does not want the reader to forget this scene, either. It is significant that

Neville Longbottom, not Harry Potter, is the last student awarded points for Gryffindor

House. In fact, Neville's points are the ones that break the tie and secure the win of the

house cup for Gryffindor house. All of Harry's own heroics are not enough. He needs

his friends to be truly victorious.

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[199] Rowling, Sorcerer's 306-307.

Rowling poignantly reveals Harry's thoughts about how Gryffindor's winning of the House Cup is better than his Quidditch team wins and it is better than Christmas. Quidditch involves only a few select players, and Christmas refers here to Harry receiving Christmas presents for the first time that year. Such pleasures affect few people. Harry prefers the larger win of the house cup for his community of all the Gryffindors at Hogwarts.

Harry Potter's role as a community hero is indicative of the society that produced him. Certainly his communally minded heroics reflect Rowling's values. The widespread popularity of his adventures reveals that those values are also accepted by contemporary society. That is not to say that people today behave as selflessly as Harry in their everyday lives, but it seems that they widely recognize such selflessness as being admirable and heroic. In an increasingly individualistic society enhanced by technologies that promote isolated working and living, perhaps the emphasis of the community in Rowling's work appeals to today's readers because it features an element that is largely missing in contemporary life.

Myths of every era reflect the societies that create them. Considering the myths of heroes from any age can assist us in identifying different values, concerns and realities of the times. In the case of Iliadic heroes, for example, it is revealing that such individualistic heroes emerged amidst the development of the polis, with all of its emphasis on civic duty and communal obligation. It is as if audiences could vicariously experience a different reality through the myths of their heroes. Perhaps it was refreshing to watch Greek heroes behave in ways that the average citizen was not permitted to.

Applying a similar approach to Harry Potter, it is possible to see that Rowling's

hero may strike a chord with contemporary audiences because he, too, is conducting himself in ways that are distinctly different from the norm. In an isolated, individualistic society (particularly in the west), it is refreshing to see someone working solely for the benefit of his community and with the aid of the community. It is as fantastic to audiences today as the incredible individual feats of Greek heroes were to audiences so long ago.

VI. MYTH FOR TODAY

Rowling's success is international, and although today's Harry Potter readers, especially the young ones, may not know each other's languages, and they may not all know the ancient myths about Jason or Odysseus, they do know Harry Potter and everything embodied by him. In spite of the different races, ethnicities, religions, nationalities and cultures of the world's children, many of them have Harry Potter in common. The series has been translated into 63 languages, and more than 300 million books have sold worldwide. For most readers in the newest generation, Harry Potter will be their introduction to mythology. The tradition of ancient mythology is carried on within Rowling's stories, where modern readers are exposed to the names, creatures, plots and symbolism of ancient myth. Rising up from the elements of the old myths and Rowling's creative use of them, is a very modern reincarnation of specific myths.

As fans await the seventh and final book of the series and the conclusion of the Harry Potter series, it is clear that we are witnessing the birth of renewed popular interest in myth. It could be said that Rowling's series is the newest manifestation of myth, and her versions of it will be read and re-readfor many years to come. Parents will use the stories as exemplary and cautionary tales, just as fairytales were used in the past. It is very easy to explain common moral dilemmas to children by citing Harry Potter stories as examples. It remains to be seen if the Harry Potter stories are a significant addition to the canon of children's (and adults') literature. Their connection to the mythology of old may infuse them with enough timelessness to ensure that they remain. The stories, which have sold internationally by the millions, have given people, especially children, who

may not have the same gods, customs, or languages, a common set of stories, characters and ideals. In a time in which the term "global village" is frequently employed, it is important to acknowledge the shared, global version of myths and morality that are emerging within it.

Many people have marveled at the multicultural, multigenerational popularity of the Harry Potter series. Bucher's article notes, "There are few books with such universal appeal." In *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, Professor Dumbledore seems to voice Rowling's universal intentions to cross cultural and generational boundaries:

> "…we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided. Lord Voldemort's gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.

Jayette Slawson suggests that the series is able to "move across social and geographic boundaries to mimetically 'read' contemporary culture." Slawson notes that the books "are pertinent to Americans precisely because they are metaphors of the contemporary (historical) moment."[200] She compares the daily bombings and murders of the wizarding world in *Harry Potter and The Half-Blood Prince* to contemporary terrorism throughout the real world. Slawson is not the first to make such connections between the series and contemporary violence. Courtney B. Strimel explains how Rowling's scenarios are beneficial in teaching coping strategies for issues related to terror and terrorism.[201]

There is a larger ethos emerging from this new manifestation of certain myths.

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[200]Jayette Slawson, "Harry Potter Books as Indexes of American Culture," The Journal of American Culture 29 (March 2006) 72-73, 72.
[201] Courtney B. Strimel, "The Politics of Terror: Rereading Harry Potter," Children's Literature in Education 35 (March 2004) 35-52.

This ethos appears clearly in Rowling's treatment of good and evil. Rowling's characters and stories express a modern notion of evil. She creates some black and white examples of good and bad people in her stories, but things become more complex as the series progresses, until spotting the villains isn't always so easy.

Essentially, the Harry Potter books are comprised of a series of mysteries that are fueled by paranoia. The main characters, and therefore the reader too, are forced to ask themselves, "Just who are the bad guys?" and "What are they up to?" Ultimately, the crux of every plot seems to hinge upon the discovery of bad guys whom we thought were good. Rowling misleads the readers by making good guys look bad and bad guys look good. In the first book, the seemingly meek and fearful teacher of Defense Against The Dark Arts, Professor Quirrell, turns out to be working to achieve the Dark Lord's return. In fact, it is revealed that he literally has two faces. Beneath his turban on the back of his head lives a sickly, parasitic remnant of the Dark Lord's face and mind. In the second book, a proper young Hogwarts student whose image is captured in a magical diary, befriends Harry and gains his trust. Eventually it is revealed that the boy is Tom Riddle, the image of Lord Voldemort as a boy, and he has tricked Harry into a deadly situation. In the third book, as previously discussed, most of the plot's events portray escaped convict Sirius Black as a murderous madman and follower of Lord Voldemort who is intent on killing Harry Potter. In the end, Harry discovers that Sirius is a loyal friend who wants to protect him and aid in the fight against the Dark Lord. In the fourth book, Harry comes to trust Mad Eye Moody, only to learn that he hasn't met the real Mad Eye Moody at all, but an imposter who disguised himself as Moody in order to fix the Tri-Wizard Tournament and send Harry straight into the Dark Lord's clutches. The fifth

book reveals the Ministry of Magic to be an ignorant, political, bureaucratic entity.   It is a dangerously flawed organization whose administrators abuse their power. Although philosophically opposed to the Dark Lord, the Ministry falls into a kind of paranoid hysteria, desperately trying to stamp out any public discussion of Lord Voldemort. Afraid of creating public hysteria, it forbids any suggestion that the Dark Lord still lives or is gaining power. This policy results in the cruel treatment of many citizens as well as the students at Hogwarts. Although they believe that they are on the side of good, Ministry members are responsible for many injustices. The sixth book continues to complicate the idea of good and evil, as Draco Malfoy, who wants very much to be bad, cannot bring himself to carry out the Dark Lord's order to murder Professor Dumbledore.

Equally complex is the character of Professor Snape, who is so cruel to Harry and his friends throughout the series, yet Dumbledore insists that this former Death Eater is truly reformed and can be trusted. Indeed, Snape seems to work with Dumbledore to thwart Voldemort's efforts to regain power and control in books four and five, yet in book six he betrays Dumbledore in the most serious way imaginable…he kills him. Snape is, by far, the most layered and mysterious of all of Rowling's characters. The reader is forced to go back and forth in deciding whether Snape is good or bad. In the end, it is clear that he is neither. He is capable of great good and great evil, and, indeed, we see him accomplish both. He represents Rowling's ultimate commentary on the nature of evil. The final book of the series reveals that Snape ultimately sacrifices himself for the good of society, but he remains a complexity to the very end. Although he died bravely to stop Voldemort, he continued to despise Harry, unfairly projecting his

jealousy and resentment of Harry's father onto Harry.[202] He has proven that evil and good are not what one is; they are choices to be made daily. Snape makes the wrong choice one day, and the right one the next. He made a bad choice in the sixth book, and yet redeems himself (somewhat) in the seventh. Rowling's treatment of Snape reminds us that evil is resilient and it is persistent, and our choices make all the difference.

Rowling depicts a modern sense of the nature of evil. She writes of an evil that is both relentless and near. Although sometimes unseen, it is ever present. Indeed, evil is always just a choice away. Rowling's idea of evil exists most prominently in the character of Lord Voldemort. As the series unfolds, Rowling reveals Voldemort's history. His story is startlingly similar to Harry's.

Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter have much in common. Both are boys of *muggle* stock; neither are purebloods. Voldemort's father was a muggle. Harry's mother came from a non-magical family. Like Harry, Voldemort was an orphan. He was raised in an orphanage. Harry was raised by his unkind aunt and uncle. Both Harry and Voldemort discovered their magical powers when they were young boys. Both were *parselmouths*, who could speak and understand the language of snakes. Physically, the two were alike as well. Both were lean with thick dark hair. Albus Dumbledore had them both brought to Hogwarts when they turned eleven, where he watched over them, carefully offering them kindness and guidance.

Edmund M. Kern claims that Rowling displays evil in two distinct ways. He notes that everyday behaviors like bigotry and indifference represent the evil that results "from a failure to make the right choices," while characters like Lord Voldemort and his followers are "beings who seem genuinely evil by nature," and "very little suggests why

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[202] Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (New York: Scholastic, 2007).

they are that way."[203] Upon closer inspection, however, Rowling actually seems to make the point that all evil can be traced back to choice. In fact, Rowling emphasizes this in the case of Voldemort. He is not an inherently evil being, destined from birth to do wrong, but a boy who could have gone in any number of directions. Kern's perspective is understandable when we consider Voldemort's depiction early in the series. However, in later books his history is gradually revealed, including his childhood. It forces the reader to look beyond the monster that he has become and to consider the boy he once was. This would explain Rowling's efforts to create startling similarities between Voldemort and Harry Potter.

It might seem strange that Rowling would create a villain who shares so much in common with the hero. The parallels between the two characters, however, further emphasize Rowling's perspective of evil. Evil is not always easily identifiable. It is not necessarily alien or far removed from everyday life. It is much closer than we think. Eventually, Voldemort became an extreme and obvious image of evil, but Rowling makes the point that he began his life just like Harry. He just chose a very different path.

Voldemort's deadly, racist agenda calls to mind real, modern villains like Adolf Hitler. Voldemort is motivated by a hatred of anyone who is not a pureblood. He envisions a world in which he has absolute power, aided by loyal purebloods. Muggles and half breeds would be reduced to the status of slaves, if they were allowed to live at all. Voldemort, whose name was originally Tom Riddle, changed it to Lord Voldemort in order to deny his muggle parentage and to give the impression of pureblood aristocracy.

The similarities between Voldemort and Adolf Hitler are undeniable, a fact that

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[203] Kern, 212.

Rowling acknowledges. She even dates the death of a historical character within the series, Grindelwald, to 1945. In interviews she has explained that she deliberately did so in order to draw parallels between her plot and the Second World War. Hitler, too, envisioned a world of so-called pure bloods, a world without Jews, and sought to promote an ideal Germanic race of blue-eyed blondes. This was an ironic ideal for a man who was dark haired and alleged to be of partial Jewish ancestry. Like Hitler, Rowling's Voldemort loathes his own heritage and attempts to compensate for his undesirable background by crusading against it.

This same self-loathing behavior is seen in another of Rowling's characters, Professor Snape. It is revealed in *Harry Potter and The Half Blood Prince* that Snape is not a pureblood but had a muggle parent. Snape also seems to despise this impure heritage, as he is the head of the Slytherin House, and was a very active, willing member of Lord Voldemort's Death Eaters. By the sixth book it seems that Snape is once again involved in the dark deeds surrounding Voldemort's return to strength and power. Although Rowling keeps her fans suspended between thinking Snape is on the side of good or bad throughout the series, there is no question that he is cruel and unkind to many students at Hogwarts, especially Harry Potter. He regularly abuses his power and authority in order to humiliate and intimidate students. Why then, does Rowling give heroic young Harry a background very similar to that of cruel Snape and wicked Voldemort? The commonality between Harry and these villains serves to impress upon the reader the importance of choice. Voldemort embodies the idea of evil in Rowling's books, but he is not evil with a capital E. He is not an outside force to be defeated by Harry Potter, after which all will be well. On the contrary, although Harry Potter will

indeed have to battle and conquer Voldemort, his work will not end there. Evil, like

Voldemort, is persistent, and for Rowling it is something to be battled daily by everyone.

It requires constant vigilance to be (and remain) good. In this way Voldemort, so similar

to Harry in history and talent, differs from him in character because of his choices. He

and Harry exemplify the way two boys can have very similar beginnings, but based on

their choices, they can live completely different lives.

Rowling's treatment of the notion of evil has been discussed by writers since the

very first book was published.   She is often compared to other writers of fantasy

literature, such as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, whose works also address the issue.

Tolkien depicts evil as an external, corrupting force to be conquered. He represents this

evil in the One Ring.   Once the ring is destroyed, peace and safety return to Middle

Earth. Rowling's approach more closely resembles that of C.S. Lewis, whose work

addressed *psychomachia*, or the battle within a person's soul.   Lewis' work was

influenced by Christian themes. His characters have to choose goodness, repeatedly.

Some characters first choose badness, but later make good choices, thus redeeming

themselves.   For example, the character of Edmund, the younger brother in *Chronicles of

Narnia*, is initially selfish, moody, mean and dishonest. Eventually, his good choices

lead him to rule over a new and idyllic age in the world of Narnia. Both C.S. Lewis and

J.K. Rowling seem to view the potential for evil as being internal and recurring.

Dickerson and O'Hara would agree, as they also see Rowling's work as emphasizing

morality as a choice that must be made.[204] Mimi R. Gladstein also acknowledges the link

between morality and choice in the series, saying, "Rowling creates a world where what

is and should be important is the 'content of one's character' and the choices one

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[204] Dickerson and O'Hara, 247.

makes."[205] David and Catherine Deavel attribute Rowling's representation of evil to three major concepts, one of which is that "moral evil can only really exist as the result of free choice."[206]

Rowling explores various choices and moral dilemmas throughout her stories. Ultimately, though, in its simplest form, she offers Lord Voldemort, a power-hungry, selfish, cold character who wants control over everyone and everything, including death itself, and she contrasts him with Harry Potter, a humble boy who has known pain and adversity similar to Voldemort's, yet who continually chooses to care and to love. He never gets caught up in his fame, nor does he become self indulgent or arrogant. Once the prophecy is revealed and Voldemort has clearly returned to some power, Harry Potter sets out repeatedly to fight him, for no other reason than to protect others. The two parallel characters are motivated by two entirely opposite perspectives: one by complete selfishness and the other by total selflessness. In this respect, Rowling's idea of evil is clear.

Rowling's use of mythology, throughout the Harry Potter series, is one of the many ways in which she paints a modern picture of today's ethical concerns. Evil is revealed to have many components and faces. In her treatment of Argus Filch, the mean-spirited night watchman of Hogwarts, she addresses the idea of unjust punishment and bullying behavior. She also captures the image of someone embittered by resentment and jealousy. The evils of discrimination and prejudice are repeatedly illuminated in Rowling's handling of giants, werewolves, and *mudbloods* (half-blooded wizards and

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[205] David Baggett and Shawn E. Klein, Harry Potter and Philosophy (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2004) 49. As Gladstein's title, "Feminism and Equal Opportunity: Hermione and the Women of Hogwarts" suggests, the article's focus is upon the ideal gender equality represented in the series.
[206] Baggett and Klein, 132.

witches). Discrimination has remained a central concern of western society since the civil rights and women's movements. It is constantly examined, litigated, discussed and considered in these cultures and many others worldwide.

Rowling also uses her mythical references to expound on various kinds of modern angst. Through personification Rowling effectively describes the essence of clinical depression and the power of puberty, as discussed in Chapter III. She also uses personification to express other universal feelings, such as unrequited love and fear of the unknown. Today's young people seemingly have more choices than the youth of any other period in history. Arranged marriages are fewer and career options are greater. In the past, the course of one's life was more limited, if not completely plotted out, from childhood. Women married, bore children, and cared for their families. People were destined to remain in the same social class to which they were born and usually were expected to carry on the same trade as their fathers. But in today's culture, especially American and European, the youth are presented with stories like that of Abraham Lincoln, William Jefferson Clinton, and Oprah Winfrey, who were born into poverty but then grew to become powerful and wealthy. Inspiring as such stories are, they can also create anxiety. When one can become anything one imagines (or so we are told), it is an awesome burden that one carries as a young adult. Rowling's expression of the angst of modern teenagers, and the choices they face, has a distinctly modern feel that resonates with people across the globe.

J.K. Rowling does not seek to write a sociopolitical treatise. It is apparent that for her the fantastic story and the world in which it takes place come first. Yet she does poignantly and repeatedly make ethical commentary throughout her writing. Between the

lines, her modern worldview emerges. Her characters cannot simply cry, "The devil made me do it!" Rowling's evil resides in the choices they make.

The essence and climate of every period in history can be heard in the voices of its writers. J.K. Rowling's distinctly modern perspective filters through the rich details of her stories and emerges most strikingly in her use of mythology within the text. With one foot in the tradition of Greco Roman mythology and the other firmly planted in the contemporary world, Rowling creates transformations that reflect modern concerns. Only time will tell whether hers will have the longevity of so many other canonical works of children's literature, but the series' international success alone implies this, regardless of the role of marketing. Whether or not her message will be remembered in 300 years, right now it is being heard by millions of people each day. That message, appearing against a backdrop of mythic history, and filled with the names, characters and ideas of mythology, consistently comments on social issues and addresses contemporary concerns.

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