Pace University
DigitalCommons@Pace

Honors College Theses | Pforzheimer Honors College

10-17-2007

Conjuring Her Self: Hermione's Self-Determination in *Harry Potter*

Gwendolyn Limbach
Pace University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/honorscollege_theses

Part of the Modern Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Limbach, Gwendolyn, "Conjuring Her Self: Hermione's Self-Determination in *Harry Potter*" (2007). *Honors College Theses.* Paper 64.
http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/honorscollege_theses/64

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Pforzheimer Honors College at DigitalCommons@Pace. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Pace. For more information, please contact rracelis@pace.edu.

Conjuring Her Self: Hermione's Self-Determination in *Harry Potter*

By Gwendolyn Limbach

Honors Thesis 2007

"But why's she got to go to the library?"
"Because that's what Hermione does," said Ron, shrugging.
"When in doubt, go to the library."
- (Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets *255*)

"Hermione, I don't know what's gotten in to you lately!" said Ron, astounded.
"First you hit Malfoy, then you walk out on Professor Trelawney—"
Hermione looked rather flattered.
-(Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban *326*)

In most classic children's literature, a female protagonist, though the center of the story, does not exhibit agency; rather, power "arrives in the form of rescue" and is acted upon her by a male hero (Sweeney).[1] Recent feminist children's literature, such as *The Princess and the Admiral* and *The Ordinary Princess*, empowers the protagonist to be her own rescuer. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series may not fit the expected mold of feminist children's literature, but one of the main characters, Hermione Granger, is certainly the books' only girl feminist.[2] Hermione separates herself from other models of girlhood, such as the silent, passive, melodramatic, and superficial girl stereotypes, to formulate her own authentic character. Rather than replicating these models, she makes her unique voice heard. These stereotypes reveal the extent to which the magical world of Rowling's stories portrays the actual state of society: the wizarding community is not a utopia of gender equality but rather a reflection of our non-fictitious world. Unlike the female students around her, Hermione is an essential element in the books, especially in the battle against Voldemort. Through her manipulation of common

[1] Fairytales have the most well-known examples of these rescues, such as in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*. These fairytales narratives are replicated many times in even contemporary literature.
[2] A Feminist in the series is one who demands and actively works for social and political equality for women and other disadvantaged groups in the wizarding world. In the fifth and sixth book I think that Ginny Weasley also develops a feminist consciousness. Minerva McGonagall is the strongest woman character and feminist throughout all the books. Rowling states that she was named for the Roman goddess of Wisdom.

narrative tropes and subversion of expectations of femininity, Hermione creates her own construction of girlhood. As a result, she emerges as the most self-actualized character in the Harry Potter series.

Hermione does not arrive at Hogwarts as a ready-made, independent feminist, and some feminist readers critical of her forget that she has just begun her development in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. When Hermione first appears she is described as having "a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 105). Though some such as Elizabeth Heilman harp on the idea that she is introduced in a negative light, her actions speak to a more positive, stronger character. Hermione shows that she is not shy or fearful of rejection when she demands that Ron perform the spell he was taught and then criticizes his failure. Once she begins a conversation with the boys about school, Hermione also demonstrates her knowledge not only about books but about Harry as well. After introductions she states "I know all about you" to Harry, and then questions his knowledge: "didn't you know [about your fame?]" and "Do either of you know what house you'll be in?" (106). Hermione marks herself as one who knows the answers whereas the boys are without the same knowledge. This pattern is repeated throughout the six heretofore published books of the series: Hermione asserts herself as the possessor of knowledge and Harry and Ron as seekers[3] of knowledge through Hermione's help.

Though intelligence is Hermione's main source of agency, in the beginning of the series it actually contains her. In her essay "Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender," Eliza Dresang contends that Hermione is actually a caricature of Rowling as a child. In various interviews the author has stated that she based Hermione's character on herself and that "Hermione is a caricature of what I was when I was 11—a real exaggeration, I wasn't that

[3] This is made explicit through their Quidditch positions, or at least Harry's—he is the Seeker on the house team.

clever—Hermione is a border-line genius at points" (Lydon). With such a personal connection between subject and author, it seems peculiar that Hermione would only inhabit the position of student without expanding her talents towards other pursuits. Until Ron and Harry save her from the troll on Halloween, Hermione is described twice as "bossy" and once as a "know-it-all" and constantly reminds the boys about the rules. As Heilman notes in her essay, "research on boys' school culture suggests that bookishness and academic achievement are considered feminine" (224). Ruthann Mayes-Elma also suggests that "girls are to take their studies seriously and be good at them, while boys are to be adventurous and not so good in school" (86). At this point in the story, Hermione fulfills this stereotypical nerd girl role. Rowling also fulfills another stereotype of girls in children's literature through the rescue from the troll. Because of Ron's taunting, Hermione hides in the girls' bathroom crying (another example of stereotypical girlish behavior) and is unaware of the troll's presence in the school. When Harry and Ron find Hermione she is "shrinking against the wall opposite, looking as if she [were] about to faint" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 175). Harry and Ron work together to knock out the troll and save the day, yet when Professor McGonagall finds them it is the boys who need saving from punishment for going after the troll. Hermione is the first to speak and instead of telling the truth, she sacrifices her standing in the eyes of her favorite professor: "I went looking for the troll because I—I thought I could deal with it on my own—you know, because I've read about them" (177). This statement has the indications of agency—Hermione seeking out something dangerous and being reassured in her ability because of her intelligence—yet she changes her story to save those who have made fun of her. Here she is replicating the cultural expectations that girls are supposed to be studious and boys adventurous and punishing herself for, even falsely, violating these norms. But instead of thinking that Hermione is justified in lying to a professor, Harry and Ron are both

shocked that she would do so. Their amazement at Hermione's deception emphasizes how out of character this action is for her. So far, only the boys are the rule-breakers, only they lie to professors; although Hermione's false confession merits the disappointment of her favorite teacher, it also earns her a place in the "boys' club" from which she has been excluded. By speaking up and lying to McGonagall, Hermione transgresses the standard saving trope and undermines her position as the "damsel in distress"; in the classic fairytales the damsel never saves her rescuer in return. In this sense, her rescue is equally important as the one the boys acted upon her.

Hermione never acts as though she is indebted to Ron or Harry after the troll incident; in fact, when all three meet again in the Gryffindor common room, "there was a very embarrassed pause. Then, none of them looking at each other, they all said 'Thanks,' and hurried off" (179). The boys' gratitude towards Hermione's lie saving them from punishment is treated as equal to her thankfulness for her rescue. Also, Rowling writes that "[t]here are some things you can't share without ending up liking each other, and knocking out a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them" (179). She does not name only Harry and Ron as those who knocked out the troll but instead writes that this is something the trio equally "shared." From this point on the reader sees Hermione test the boundaries of her status and of cultural norms. In the following chapter, Hermione has the opportunity to rescue Harry during his Quidditch game and takes it. When it appears that Snape is jinxing Harry's broom Hermione acts first. Without explanation or request for help, Hermione says "Leave it to me" and disappears (190). As Ron helplessly watches Harry struggle, he mutters "desperately" for Hermione to do something as she fights her way across the stand to Snape (191). With "a few, well-chosen words… [b]right blue flames" shoot from her wand at Snape's foot, and he breaks eye contact with Harry's broom (191). Though it

later turns out that Professor Quirrell was actually performing the jinx, Hermione nonetheless takes action against a teacher to save her friend. Hermione begins to realize, or at least express her earlier realization that she can affect the world around her. Out of a stadium filled with older students and adult professors, only she and Snape try to save Harry.[4]

At the climax of the book, Hermione uses logic to save the day, yet she still seems to be contained by the same conditions of her intelligence. On their quest to save the Sorcerer's Stone, Ron valiantly sacrifices himself to get the others past the transfigured wizard chess board and nearly dies. Hermione contributes by solving Snape's potions puzzle and allows Harry to send her back without continuing on.[5] She proves her merit by recognizing that "[t]his isn't magic—it's logic—a puzzle" and then solving the problem (285). She understands that " [a] lot of great wizards haven't got an ounce of logic, [so] they'd be stuck in here forever" and by acknowledging that she can get herself and Harry out of the room, sets herself above some of those "great wizards" (285). Hermione also ignores Harry's doubtful question "But so will we [be stuck here forever], won't we?" with a simple "Of course not" (285-286). This scene reveals the importance Hermione has not only to Harry but also to the story itself: she has found the potion that will send Harry forward and her back. Without her intelligence and, specifically, her logic Harry would not be able to pass through the fire to confront Quirrell nor could he turn back and escape. Instead of receiving praise first, she tells Harry that he is a great wizard, to which he responds, "I'm not as good as you" (287). Rather than accepting this compliment, Hermione eschews her rightful praise and seems to belittle herself and her intelligence: "Me!...Books! And cleverness! There are more important things—friendship and bravery and—oh Harry—be

[4] Although it turns out that Snape was not jinxing Harry's broom but in fact trying to save him, Hermione has "knocked into Professor Quirrell" in her rush to get to Snape. As Quirrell reveals much later, he was jinxing Harry's broom, so even though she does not realize it Hermione still saves Harry's life.

[5] Interestingly enough, this scene is cut from the movie, which reinforces the incorrect belief that Hermione's intelligence is discounted by her male friends.

careful!" (287). Hermione is modest almost to the point of self-denigration, and, as Patricia Pender argues, "we assume [women who claim they are unworthy] have internalized the misogynist mores of contemporary…literature" (105). However, Hermione's words are not meant to be taken at face value, even though "women's modesty rhetoric is usually read as a straightforward statement of ineptitude and illegitimacy" (Pender 104). By showing this false modesty Hermione helps Harry find confidence to face whatever lies ahead. Harry knows that he must face one of Voldemort's servants in the next room without Hermione's intelligence. While Hermione's statement is meant to aid Harry mentally, it is also meant to evoke disbelief in the reader. As readers, we know that her books and cleverness are actually some of the *most* vital "things." Books themselves may not be the most important aspect of the novels, but the way that Hermione applies the information within them to the real world demonstrates their necessity. Yet Heilman contends that because of this and other events "Hermione is primarily an enabler of Harry's and Ron's adventures, rather than an adventurer in her own right" (224). Heilman fails to consider that Ron's sacrifice on the animated wizard chessboard also enables Harry and Hermione to continue on their quest. She also does not acknowledge that Hermione made a sacrifice for Harry just as Ron did. Rather than treating each as equally important, Heilman reinforces the double standard that society imposes on girls. At this point, though, the problem with Hermione's use of the modesty trope is that she is defined by the stereotype of the bookish girl, so for her to demean that place risks lessening her status in the eyes of readers who have yet to understand that a modesty trope is rhetoric that seems to express the internalization of patriarchal oppression but in fact is meant to convey the agency of the speaker.

Hermione's personal growth moves in another direction in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* as she is further girlified through her feelings toward Professor Lockhart.

Rather than discovering more complex characteristics, Hermione is surprisingly restricted in this step of her development. Until the trio is about to have their first Defense Against the Dark Arts class, Hermione seems to be gaining more freedom to express her intelligence. Whereas in *The Sorcerer's Stone* Hermione's expression of knowledge was viewed with some disdain, now it seems more accepted. For example, in their first Herbology lesson it is "[t]o nobody's surprise" that Hermione's hand is the first in the air to answer a question (*Chamber of Secrets* 91). This short passage is one of the first times in the beginning of the series that Rowling allows Hermione to speak for herself when giving an answer, rather than relying on the third person narrator to relate the event. Hermione explicitly earns approval not only from professors but also, by winning points and contributing to the inter-house competition, from her peers. No longer is she teased by others for her intelligence, but rather she is respected as a leading member of the school community. This point is further reinforced when Justin Finch-Fletchley, a member of Hufflepuff House, compliments Hermione upon first meeting her: "Hermione Granger—always top in everything" and shakes her hand (94).

Along with speaking up in class, Hermione also expresses her sexuality, something that neither Ron nor Harry can do or even hint at until the fourth book. In the middle of a discussion about classes Ron points out a difference in her: "'*Why*,' demanded Ron, seizing her schedule, 'have you outlined all Lockhart's lessons in little hearts?' …Hermione snatched the schedule back, blushing furiously" (95). Her initial interest in this new, handsome professor denotes a maturity that Ron and Harry lack, which in part can be attributed to her being almost an entire year older than both.[6] This crush also makes her character more complex than any of the others, especially when it meets with derision by classmates. During their first lesson the contrast

[6] Rowling states that Hermione was born September 19th, 1979; Harry was born July 31st, 1980; and Ron was born March 1st 1980. All first years must be 11 when they enter Hogwarts, so Hermione just missed the cut-off date (http://www.jkrowling.com).

between her opinion of the professor and that of the other boys becomes apparent: Ron stares at Lockhart "with an expression of disbelief" while Seamus and Dean are "shaking with silent laughter"; Hermione, on the other hand, is "listening to Lockhart with rapt attention and [gives] a start when he mentioned her name" (100). Whereas the boys recognize the ineptitude of their new teacher, Hermione does not do the same, at least right away. But rather than being blinded by an infatuation, Hermione defends Lockhart's teaching style because she has read the books about his magical exploits. Ron cuts her excuse-making short at times and points out that these are things "[h]e *says* he's done" (103). Though Hermione follows her instincts in trusting the expected truthfulness of books, she appears unable to accept the idea that they could deceive her. Here, her crush allows her to mature ahead of her friends as well as discover that not all books tell the truth. From this Hermione begins more critically to assess what information she accepts in her pursuit of knowledge.

Hermione's crush on her professor also sets up a common narrative trope that Timothy Shary discusses in his essay "The Nerdly Girl and Her Beautiful Sister": the transformation of the nerdly girl into a more attractive character through the subjugation of her intelligence. Most obvious in the 1990s, "movies like *She's All That* and *Never Been Kissed* were visibly demonstrating that for young women, being smart and unattractive is a dangerous combination of qualities that can only lead to grief" (Shary 244). The nerdly girl transformation is an all too pervasive theme, and Hermione refuses to conform to it. Rather than concentrate on changing her appearance or "dumbing herself down" to earn Lockhart's approval, Hermione actually shows a more developed intelligence. When the boys are wondering how to discover whether Draco Malfoy is in fact Slytherin's heir, Hermione suggests using the Polyjuice Potion to question Malfoy without his knowing: "'There might be a way…Of course, it would be difficult.

And dangerous, very dangerous. We'd be breaking about fifty school rules, I expect'" (*Chamber of Secrets* 159). Hermione demonstrates not only an advanced knowledge of potions in just her second year, but also a relaxing of her strict adherence to rules since the book and the potion ingredients are restricted. Rather than breaking rules to yield to Harry and Ron's desire for adventure, Hermione initiates the out of bounds behavior and takes it to a more sophisticated level than simply being out of bed after hours. She formulates an entire scheme, which includes deceiving Professor Lockhart, before Harry and Ron catch on. In fact, Hermione exploits Lockhart's appreciation of her intelligence to further her own illegal plans by getting his signature to check out a book from the restricted section.

During *Chamber of Secrets*, Hermione is explicitly compared to Professor McGonagall, revealing the inherent strength that the former possesses. Hermione is continually described as looking or acting in a manner resembling the female Transfiguration teacher.[7] For example, when Harry and Ron arrive at school after flying the bewitched Ford Anglia, Hermione exclaims, "'You're not telling me you *did* fly here?'...sounding almost as severe as Professor McGonagall" (84). Later, as Hermione is instructing the boys on how to slip Crabbe and Goyle a sleeping draught, she rebuffs any of their doubts with "a steely glint in her eye not unlike the one Professor McGonagall sometimes had" (213). Comparisons like these help give Hermione the strength that readers have associated with McGonagall since her first appearance at Hogwarts: "Harry's first thought was that this was not someone to cross" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 113). J.K. Rowling herself has expressed admiration for Hermione and Professor McGonagall in interviews. During a radio interview before the release of *Goblet of Fire*, Rowling noted that she has received an email asking her "When are we going to see strong female characters?" to which

[7] It should also be noted that Transfiguration is acknowledged as the most difficult subject. At the beginning of her first year, Hermione says that she looks forward to Transfiguration most even though it is very complex magic.

Rowling responded, "I was deeply offended because I think Hermione and Professor McGonagall are very strong characters" (Lydon). Since these two characters are held in such high regard in Rowling's mind, constructing them as similar provides strength for Hermione that she can build upon later in the story. In the first novel she is studious yet not depicted as particularly strong, but "Hermione's compulsion to study is a legitimate beginning place for helping her develop into a strong character" (Dresang 222). In this second novel Hermione takes her intelligence further to attempt brewing dangerous potions and continue investigating the source of attacks on students.

Unfortunately for Hermione, though, once she accomplishes the latter of the two tasks in *Chamber of Secrets* she is herself attacked by the very thing she seeks and is unable to complete the quest. Critics like Heilman will note once again that Hermione can only "help or enable the male characters in some way… [but never] for her own self interest" (Heilman 92). Though Hermione is not physically present for a portion of the novel, her character maintains an absent presence that is felt by the other characters.[8] The most obvious example comes when Ron and Harry must follow clues that lead into the forest: "Ron…looked sideways at the empty seat usually filled by Hermione. The sight seemed to stiffen his resolve, and he nodded" (*Chamber of Secrets* 270). Some critics fail to comprehend the mutual interdependency of the trio, and Ron and Harry's particular dependence on Hermione. When Hermione realizes that the mysterious disembodied voice comes from a snake since only Harry can speak Parseltongue and learns that the creature is a basilisk, she takes action. She writes a note on the page describing a basilisk and rips it out of a library book, which appears to be very un-Hermione-like. After she has been

[8] Absent presence, as Hans Bertens discusses it in terms of poststructuralism, comes from the theory that the text sets up a center that gives it stability and everything that is not included in the center is marginal. The tension between center and margin creates a binary opposition that is "often implicit…or else only one of the terms involved is explicitly mentioned. That explicit mention, then, evokes the other, absent term" (128). When Ron and Harry repeatedly note Hermione's absence, the actual Hermione is brought to mind.

"Petrified," Harry says "'Hermione had just realized the monster was a basilisk. I bet you anything she warned the first person she met to look around corners with a mirror first!'" (*Chamber of Secrets* 291). Harry acknowledges his friend's accomplishment in figuring out what has been attacking students as well as her bravery and concern for others. Hermione's research not only saves a fellow student from death but also gives Harry and Ron the needed information to discover the monster. Hermione also receives credit for discovering the basilisk's existence and method of getting around the school: Harry twice refers specifically to Hermione scribbling the words "pipes" on the foot of the page (290, 291). Both Harry and Ron rely on Hermione's investigative intelligence to help save the day. At the same time, she expects them to be able to solve a problem without her having to give them the answer. After she has been reawakened Hermione congratulates him "screaming 'You solved it! You solved it!'" (339). According to Roberta Seelinger Trites, interdependency among characters in children's literature "involves a mutual dependency that emphasizes equality" and the three friends do indeed treat each other as equals in this and many other instances.

Hermione's independence, and Harry and Ron's dependence on Hermione, gains more attention in the third novel of the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Once again she becomes a kind of absent presence because of her heavy course load, but she does not allow this to stifle her voice. Hermione is taking three subjects more than Ron and Harry, and she is constantly questioned as to why she would want to do so and how she accomplishes this feat. But rather than blushing and apologizing for her ambition, she simply ignores any questions without feeling the need to explain. At one point Ron wonders aloud to Harry, "'Do you get the feeling Hermione's not telling us something?'" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 130). Never does Hermione ask the same question of Harry or Ron; through her pursuit of knowledge Hermione is

able to find autonomy to support her through her most difficult year yet. At this point she chooses to be independent and responsible, but after several arguments with Harry, and Ron in particular, Hermione is forced to rely on only herself.

Hermione's absent presence is emphasized by the continual question of how she can keep up with so many classes, most of which take place at the same time. This question foreshadows the eventual revelation that Hermione uses a time-traveling device, known as a Time-Turner, to be in two places at once. This is not something any other student at Hogwarts has: "'Professor McGonagall made me swear I wouldn't tell anyone. She had to write all sorts of letters to the Ministry of Magic so I could have one. She had to tell them that I was a model student, and that I'd never, ever use it for anything except my studies'" (395-396). Because of her maturity and intelligence, Hermione is accorded special access to magic that not even Harry is allowed to know about. Though she appears stressed because of her newfound responsibility, Hermione accepts and is not constrained by her greater access to knowledge, and receiving the Time-Turner further demonstrates McGonagall's confidence in Hermione's capabilities.

Her dedication to more difficult and logic-based subjects also gives Hermione support to critique imprecise branches of magic and unconditional belief in them. As with her behavior towards Professor Lockhart in *Chamber of Secrets*, her conduct towards the Divination teacher, Professor Trelawney, reveals Hermione's recognition that professors are not always experts. Furthermore, Hermione vocalizes this realization beginning in the first class, scoffing at Trelawney's "gift" and continues even after she drops the subject months later. This is the first time that she openly, and explicitly to a teacher, criticizes a class. As Trelawney "divines" that Harry has a deadly enemy, Hermione, "in a loud whisper," says that "everyone knows *that*" (106). Her friends and the reader note this change in Hermione's character: "Harry and Ron

stared at her with a mixture of amazement and admiration. They had never heard Hermione speak to a teacher like that before" (106). Hermione no longer accepts whatever education she is given at Hogwarts; instead she questions points of view and methods she does not agree with to expand her understanding of the world. It is also notable that "Professor Trelawney chose not to reply"; at this point Hermione does not receive censure for being outspoken (106). Thus she feels more secure in the role of a critical student and is better able to question other teachers and even endure harsher disapproval.

Hermione also takes her logical, and more critical, approach to knowledge outside the classroom, even if it meets with displeasure from her fellows students. When Lavender Brown in sobbing over the news that her rabbit Binky has been killed, she says "tragically" that she should have known because Professor Trelawney predicted "'that thing you're dreading, it will happen in the sixteenth of October!'" (148). Though the whole class gathers around Lavender, Hermione "hesitates" and questions the circumstances of Lavender's dreading her rabbit's death: "'Well, look at it logically,' said Hermione, turning to the rest of the group. 'I mean, Binky didn't even die today, did he? Lavender just got the news today… and she *can't* have been dreading it, because it's come as a real shock'" (149). While Hermione sympathizes with her classmate's sadness, she critiques Lavender's belief in Trelawney through logic. Hermione also has a platform to discuss her ideas and the confidence to use it as she turns "to the rest of the group," in effect trying to educate them so they do not accept everything they are told. In later classes, Lavender and her friend Parvati criticize Hermione for disbelieving Trelawney by whispering behind their hands and glaring at her from across the room. Their actions sharply contrast those of Hermione and highlight the latter's maturity not only in education but also in

social interactions. Hermione ignores any personal censure from girls her age and thus reveals her growing personal strength.

This strength manifests itself more overtly when Hermione must confront her two best friends and deal with her resulting ostracism. The panic over Sirius Black is everywhere in the magical world, yet out of the trio only Hermione seems aware of how "serious" it is. On Christmas morning, Harry mysteriously receives the best and most expensive flying broom in the world from an anonymous donor, but neither he nor Ron sees anything odd about it. Hermione, on the other hand, refuses to take events at face value and advises that no one should ride the broom yet. Rather than keeping her suspicions to herself, she goes to Professor McGonagall who shares the opinion that the broom was sent by Sirius Black and is jinxed. Though Hermione does not enjoy "telling on" Harry, she does so in order to protect him from harm. Ron seems more upset with her than Harry, but she stands up to him, literally, and defends her actions: "Hermione threw her book aside. She was still pink in the face, but stood up and faced Ron defiantly" (232). Even though she faces the censure of her two closest friends, Hermione is strong enough to follow her beliefs.

The feud between Ron's and Hermione's pets, Scabbers and Crookshanks, provides another instance of Hermione's ability to surmount conflict with her friends. Though he bemoans his rat's uselessness, Ron is quick to defend it against the perceived threat of Hermione's cat. This seems like a silly argument until the real fight when it appears that Crookshanks has eaten Scabbers. Both are so angry with each other that "[i]t looked like the end of Ron and Hermione's friendship" (252). Even though Hermione "fiercely maintains" that there is no proof, Harry agrees with Ron that all the evidence points to Crookshanks' guilt. Faced with both boys' resentment, Hermione pushes them away: "'Okay, side with Ron, I knew you

would!...First the Firebolt, now Scabbers, everything's my fault, isn't it! Just leave me alone, Harry, I've got a lot of work to do!'" (253). Her best friends place much blame on Hermione this year; in addition, she faces the extra stress of school and preparing a defense for the wrongly accused hippogriff Buckbeak.[9] While she is not invincible, she proves herself resilient to the pressure she is under. Hagrid reprimands Ron and Harry for their ostracizing Hermione: "I thought you'd two value yer friend more'n broomsticks or rats… She's got her heart in the right place" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 274). Again the theme of friendship taking precedence over everything else appears, and again it is the boys who receive this lesson. Hermione already knows the importance of friendship and loyalty, as evidenced by her heartfelt reaction to Ron's promise to help her work on Buckbeak's appeal case and their reconciliation (292).

In addition to the criticism she receives from her friends, Hermione receives much censure from her professors. Snape lashes out at Hermione more emphatically than at any of her classmates. When he teaches the Defense Against the Darks Arts class because Professor Lupin is sick, Snape tries to demean Lupin and the class, but Hermione keeps interrupting him. The second time she is "seemingly unable to restrain herself" and the third time Snape cruelly reproves her (171). After he has asked a question about how to distinguish a werewolf from true wolf, Snape ignores Hermione even though she is the only one who has raised her hand. Rather than retreat into silence as Parvati does after objecting, Hermione interjects with what would be the correct answer until Snape cuts her off: "'That is the second [actually third] time that you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger…Five more points from Gryffindor for being and insufferable know-it-all'" (172). This personal insult elicits anger from her classmates because they realize that, no matter who it is, no one should be verbally attacked. The fact that it is

[9] A hippogriff is a magical creature with the body of a horse and the head of an eagle. Buckbeak wounded Malfoy's arm during a Care of Magical Creatures lesson, taught by Hagrid, after he insulted the very proud creature. Of course, if he has listened to Hagrid's instructions this would not have happened.

Snape who does this only emphasizes the injustice of his actions and prompts a defensive response from Ron, "who told Hermione she was a know-it-all at least twice a week… 'You asked a question and she knows the answer! Why ask if you don't want to be told?'" (172). Hermione's being a know-it-all has become more a quirk than an annoyance and the contempt is shifted to anyone criticizing this aspect of her personality.

Hermione's personality has also developed in terms of physically challenging her antagonist and demonstrating that she has more than words at her disposal. Many readers (including myself) savor the moment when Hermione smacks Malfoy for making fun of Hagrid:

> Harry and Ron both made furious moves toward Malfoy, but Hermione got there first—SMACK!
> She had slapped Malfoy across the face with all the strength she could muster. Malfoy staggered. Harry, Ron, Crabbe, and Goyle stood flabbergasted as Hermione raised her hand again.
> "Don't you *dare* call Hagrid pathetic, you foul—you evil—"
> "Hermione!" said Ron weakly, and he tried to grab her hand as she swung it back.
> "Get *off*, Ron!"
> Hermione pulled out her wand. Malfoy stepped backward. Crabbe and Goyle looked at him for instructions, thoroughly bewildered (293).

Up to this point Hermione has either ignored Malfoy's taunting or has retaliated only with words. Here she demonstrates that she can be just as physical as her male friends and in fact shows herself to be quicker than either. Her slap is not shown to be weak; the force actually makes Malfoy stagger. Compared to the "flabbergasted" reactions of everyone else, Hermione appears to be the most in control. Ron's reaction is described as "weak," and his attempt to restrain Hermione is futile as she quickly pulls out her wand. Though she shows that she may not physically hit Malfoy again and instead use magic, he seems to be scared enough and recoils. Even the imposing Crabbe and Goyle are confused and unable to act; all three retreat to safety away from this girl who can not only best them in the classroom but also best them in a fight.

In an even more rebellious moment, Hermione, along with Harry and Ron, attacks Snape when he attempts to take Sirius away to the Dementors. Snape yells at Hermione to be quiet, this time going as far as calling her a "STUPID GIRL!" and she falls silent (36). As Snape moves toward the door, his wand pointed between Sirius's eyes, "Harry [makes] up his mind in a split second" and yells "'*Expelliarmus!*'" (361). Without planning it, Harry, Hermione, and Ron together disarm Snape at exactly the same moment, revealing that all three had the same split-second thought and acted in tune with one another. Though Hermione worries about having attacked a teacher, she does not hesitate to do so and shows herself as equal with Ron and Harry in rebelling to such a great degree. This act fully resolves the tensions between the trio and shows that they are once again a united group. But not knowing that the other two would both try to disarm Snape also shows that Hermione is willing to act alone without Harry and Ron's support.

A willingness to act without anyone else's help serves Hermione well in the fourth novel, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when she campaigns for the rights of house-elves even though most of the wizarding world disagrees with her point of view.[10] After witnessing the abuse that Winky, Ministry official Barty Crouch's house-elf, endures, Hermione immediately recognizes the meaning of the house-elves' plight: "'It's slavery, that's what it is!…he's got her bewitched so she can't even run when they start trampling tents!'" (*Goblet of Fire* 125). Just as Hermione is quick to identify the oppression, Ron is quick to reproduce the cultural rationale behind house-elf enslavement by telling her, "'Well, the house-elves are happy, aren't they?...You heard old Winky back at the [Quidditch] match… 'House-elves is not supposed to have fun'…that's what she likes, being bossed around'" (125). Hermione again shows her

[10] House-elves are magical servants that are bound to serve one wizarding family until they die or are released by their own through the giving of clothes. They are magically powerful creatures, yet are bound to do their master's every command. If they violate any command house-elves feel compelled to punish themselves physically.

critical approach to seemingly "natural" aspects of our culture that Ron and Harry accept as truth. Here, though, Hermione's censure of supposedly normal practices extends to life outside the classroom and spurs her on to outspoken activism. Immediately questioning Ron's rationale for house-elf enslavement and, especially, the indoctrination of such beliefs, Hermione says, "'It's people like *you*, Ron…who prop up rotten and unjust systems, just because they're too lazy...'" (125). Even Hermione's analytical thinking and language has matured since the previous novel to show her ability to grasp concepts of cultural and social oppression. Her recognition and analysis of the house-elves' situation is also connected to her gendered position in and out of wizarding society. Out of the trio, it is the girl who sees the injustice because she and women before her have felt the repercussions of the hierarchical systems wizards, not witches, have instituted. Indeed, some of the rhetoric to describe a house-elf's life echoes old-fashioned notions about a woman's place in society: "'Well, they hardly ever leave the kitchen by day, do they?' said Nearly Headless Nick. 'They come out at night to do a bit of cleaning…'" (182). Hermione is more attuned to the oppression both women and minorities share at the hands of the hegemonic wizards in power. Through her protests, Hermione challenges both the enslavement of the other and the subjugation of women.

Her analysis of the house-elves' enslavement and the system that maintains it also contrasts with Harry's own interaction with house-elves, in the form of Dobby, in the second novel. Though Dobby explains a house-elf's role when he appears in Harry's bedroom, Harry does not recognize the creature's predicament. At the end of *Chamber of Secrets*, after Harry realizes how awful Dobby's life is, he frees Dobby from his enslavement. Writer Brycchan Carey compares how Hermione and Harry deal with the house-elves' situation: "Unlike Harry, whose response to the problem was largely personal, Hermione sees the problem as a public one,

requiring political engagement to reach public solutions" (105). Indeed, upon her return to Hogwarts and discovery that all the food they eat is prepared and all the rooms are cleaned by unpaid house-elves, Hermione decides to protest this slavery. At first she goes on a hunger strike at dinner, but at breakfast the next morning says, "'I've decided there are better ways of making a stand about elf rights" (*Goblet of Fire* 194). Spending meal time and any spare moments in the library, Hermione researches the history of house-elf enslavement and creates an activist group with a rather unfortunate acronym, The Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (S.P.E.W.). Hermione takes this group and the cause very seriously, creating a manifesto, recruiting members, planning a leaflet campaign, and starting meetings. Even the group's goals reflect common activist strategies: "'Our short term aims…are to secure house-elves fair wages and working conditions. Our long term goals include changing the law about non-wand use, and trying to get an elf into the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, because they're shockingly underrepresented'" (225). Hermione's methods of political activism serve almost as an allegory of the British abolition movement in the late 18th and early 19th century. Carey concurs, stating that "[t]he antislavery campaign was both the first mass political movement in British history and the event that introduced the campaigning techniques used by Hermione to British public life" (107).

Like any political movement, S.P.E.W. meets with its share of criticism, most repeatedly from Ron; however, we have seen that Hermione is stronger than the censure some characters place upon her. Although Ron, Harry, and even Hagrid question her activism, Hermione's efforts receive approval from two guiding forces in the series: Sirius Black and Dumbledore.[11]

[11] As revealed at the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Sirius is not dangerous and was wrongly convicted. Additionally, he is Harry's godfather and often acts as a surrogate parent. Dumbledore expresses the importance of treating house-elves kindly in the next book, *Order of the Phoenix*. Dumbledore is generally the moral yardstick against which all actions are measured in the series.

When the trio goes to visit Sirius, who is hiding outside Hogsmeade village, and they discuss the events at the Quidditch World Cup (when Winky was "sacked"), Sirius silences Ron's derision of Hermione's house-elf defense. They debate the likelihood of Mr. Crouch conjuring the Dark Mark[12] and sacking Winky as a way of shifting suspicion from himself, and Sirius tells them that "'[Hermione's] got the measure of Crouch better than you have Ron. If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals'" (*Goblet of Fire* 525). This statement and Hermione's overall campaign reveal how "significant" political involvement is "as the Harry Potter novels are the most politically engaged novels to have been written for children in recent years" (Carey 105). Hermione provides an exemplary instance of informed participation in society at a time, outside the novels, when civil engagement is most needed.

Hermione then applies the politics of equality and acceptance to an issue even closer to her own life and the lives of girls reading these books: body image and idealized female beauty. Now that even greater pressure is placed upon girls to live up to higher standards of beauty this subject is of the utmost importance. A marked difference in this novel from the previous ones is the preoccupation with body image, but this is not to reinforce cultural standards of beauty for girls. Rather, the obsession with image by other girls in the books juxtaposes Hermione's disinterest and even mocking of such standards. Some of the girls in *Goblet of Fire* are fixated on attaining idealized beauty[13] and this becomes most apparent at the Yule Ball.

Though she leaves to get ready for the Yule Ball hours before her male friends do and dresses up like her female counterparts, Hermione transformation into a "beauty: is an ironic one.

[12] The Dark Mark is a symbol used by Death Eaters to show that they have visited a location and looks like a snake slithering out of a skeleton's mouth. During Voldemort's reign Death Eaters would put the Dark Mark above a house where they had just killed a person, so the appearance of the symbol at the World Cup causes hysteria.
[13] The focus on Fleur Delacour increases the attention on looks as she is described as quite attractive, with a thin build and long blond hair.

Indeed, the manner in which she is introduced is exaggerated and cannot be taken seriously. Harry is the first to see her with her date, Viktor Krum:

> His eyes fell instead on the girl next to Krum. His jaw dropped.
> It was Hermione.
> But she didn't look like Hermione at all. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes made of a floaty, periwinkle-blue material, and she was holding herself differently somehow—or maybe it was merely the absence of the twenty or so books she usually had slung over her back (414).

The short sentence "It was Hermione" stands on its own, neither a part of the paragraph where she is unnamed nor of the proceeding one that describes her appearance; this sentence also contrasts the following one: "But she didn't look like Hermione at all" (414). The description of Hermione's appearance, practically a blazon,[14] is made up entirely of comparisons to her former looks. Hermione seems to shrug aside her "transformation" as she greets Harry and his date; her new appearance seems to be more noteworthy to everyone else than it is to her. This, of course, is the point. By changing her appearance with ease and inciting such reactions, Hermione demonstrates that the emphasis on physical beauty is absurd.

Some readers feel that Hermione changes her looks to please her new romantic interest, Viktor, yet her physical appearance seems to have no effect on the relationship. In fact, Hermione's intelligence is what attracts Viktor to her in the first place. Hermione tells an obviously jealous Ron that "'he said he'd been coming up to the library every day to try and talk to me, but he hadn't been able to pluck up the courage'" (*Goblet of Fire* 422). With Viktor,

[14] The most well-known examples of French blazon in poetry are *Blason anatomiques du corps femenin* (1543) in which the poets each praise a separate piece of the female body. Feminist critics have analyzed the blazon and shown that rather than praising the woman (or body part) they in fact objectify and fragment her in the name of idealized beauty. As Nancy Vickers claims, this description is "shaped predominantly by the male imagination for the male imagination; it is, in large part, a byproduct of men talking to men about women" (95). The irony in this scene, of course, is that it is written by a woman.

Hermione has another opportunity not only to demonstrate her sexual maturity, especially in contrast to Harry and Ron, but also to further mock the teen transformation narrative. In these tropes the nerdly girl must transform herself *in order to* attain the handsome love interest; however, the interaction between Viktor and Hermione occurs in the reverse order. Viktor is attracted to Hermione because of her intelligence, and since he has already asked her to the ball and expressed his interest, Hermione's superficial transformation is not done to "win" him. Rather, any alteration she wishes to make to her appearance is for her personal enjoyment and not for the pleasure of anyone else.

However, some critical readers are tricked by Hermione's subversion of the Cinderella trope and see her transformation as giving in to cultural expectations. Heilman disregards the fact that Hermione bemoans the methods of her transformation the next day and criticizes her for "giving in." She quotes research that "indicates that many adolescent girls value their looks more than their intelligence and schoolwork," yet Heilman fails to realize that Hermione's new hairstyle or dress never takes her attention away from school (229). Heilman, in fact, treats this one instance of dressing up as though Hermione were altering her entire personality[15] and by doing this Heilman replicates the cultural standard that dictates that girls are either smart or pretty, never both. Mayes-Elma replicates this standard as well when she claims that in literature "a woman must be unattractive to be considered intelligent" (97). In contrast to the ease with which Hermione can alter her appearance, these two critical readers seem more image-obsessed than any teenage girl. Hermione's evening of traditional "girliness" reveals that she is able to change her appearance without the psychological or emotional problems that many young girls

[15] Heilman also contends that Hermione's changed front teeth show a "dangerous" inclination towards plastic surgery. This claim is made all the more ridiculous by the fact that both Hermione's parents are dentists and had wanted her to fix her teeth through Muggle braces. To call the shrinking of her front teeth (after having been jinxed so that they grew below her chin) plastic surgery, let alone dangerous, seems quite extreme.

face. By down playing this Cinderella-like transformation Hermione proves that she is the most well-adjusted character of either sex.

Hairstyles and Yule balls are soon forgotten by the end of *Goblet of Fire* and the beginning of the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, with the return of Lord Voldemort. Of all the trio Hermione seems to be the most in tune with the shifts, both subtle and obvious, occurring in the wizarding world. Over the summer when Harry is stuck at home, away from other wizards, he waits for breaking news of disaster to mark the reappearance of Voldemort. Whereas he reads only the front page of the wizard newspaper, *The Daily Prophet*, and listens to the Muggle evening news, Hermione carefully reads the entire paper and has discerned the subtle smear campaign created by the Ministry against Harry and Dumbledore to discredit any rumors of Voldemort's return. When the trio returns to Hogwarts to find the Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic, Dolores Umbridge, now teaching, Hermione gleans a lot of "illuminating" information from Umbridge's speech. Harry says that it sounded "like a load of waffle," but Hermione observes, "'There was some importance stuff hidden in the waffle'" (*Order of the Phoenix* 214). Neither Ron nor Harry understand that "'it means the Ministry's interfering at Hogwarts'" to the detriment of their education and, in a larger sense, to their lives (214).

In their first Defense Against the Dark Arts class with Professor Umbridge, Hermione not only understands the new teacher's role but also denounces it openly. When Umbridge outlines the course aims, none of which involve practical use of defensive magic, Hermione ignores the class assignment and questions the teacher: "Harry could not remember Hermione ever neglecting to read when instructed to, or indeed resisting the temptation to open any book…He looked at her questioningly, but she merely shook her head slightly to indicate that she was not

about to answer questions, and continued to stare at Professor Umbridge" (241). Hermione again transcends her role as avid learner by refusing to read the assigned book and querying the teacher's refusal to actually teach. As we have seen in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione has no qualms about criticizing her professors and subjects, so it comes as no surprise that she would continue to do so in her fifth year. The marked difference in her approach this time is that she knows what is at stake by *not* speaking up. As Karley Kristine Adley writes in her article for the academic journal, *The Washington and Jefferson College Review*, "Hermione shows no fear in illustrating that she is not challenged by Umbridge" when so many of her classmates are (108). In the following DADA class, Hermione further confronts the professor's censuring of information when Umbridge tries to test Hermione's claim that she has read the entire book for class. The professor asks for an obscure piece of information from a later chapter and, of course, Hermione recites the author's words verbatim. Umbridge is "impressed against her," but Hermione goes further than simply repeating information; she disagrees with the author's point of view and makes a valid argument against it (*Order of the Phoenix* 316). Hermione, "in disagreeing with an authority's statement, implicitly suggests that she also does not have a problem with disagreeing with Umbridge" (Adley 108). Throughout her years at Hogwarts, Hermione has learned to engage the information she is taught rather than simply absorb and reiterate it. She takes this concept to another level when she is not allowed to learn the advanced defensive magic that everyone needs after Voldemort's return.

Hermione also actively rebels against Umbridge by forming a Defense Against the Dark Arts club, which she calls Dumbledore's Army. When she suggests the idea to Ron and Harry, she says that "'we've gone past the stage where we can just learn things out of books'" (*Order of the Phoenix* 325). In this novel Hermione's dependence on and faith in books are repeatedly

shown to be secondary to her acts of rebellion. She proposes that Harry teach them DADA to prepare "for what's waiting out there. It's about making sure we can really defend ourselves. If we don't learn anything for a whole year..." (325). Though her argument is founded on the necessity of knowledge, Hermione takes it one step further and applies it to the world outside of Hogwarts. What truly demonstrates her certainty in the need for defense lessons, and what convinces Harry to teach them, is when she says Voldemort's name for the first time. While Ron and the rest of the wizarding community[16] still refuse to say his name, or quake at its mention, by uttering his name Hermione shows her resolve to not only oppose him but anyone who stands in the way of her doing so. Once Harry agrees to teach the defense club, Hermione plans the first meeting in the Hog's Head Tavern of the local village and solicits people she thinks would be interested. When the potential members arrive, she speaks timidly, but at the thought of Umbridge and the limitations on knowledge, Hermione gains assurance:

> 'I had the idea— that it might be good if people who wanted to study Defense Against the Dark Arts— and I mean really study it, you know, not that rubbish Umbridge is doing with us'— (Hermione's voice became suddenly much stronger and more confident)— 'because nobody could call that Defense Against the Dark Arts'— 'Hear, hear,' said Anthony Goldstein, and Hermione looked heartened— 'well, I thought it would be good if we, well, took matters into our own hands' (339).

Whereas Ron and Harry seem unable to start the meeting, Hermione can do so and finds strength in her own words and the encouragement of her peers. Her conviction of attaining knowledge, for herself and everyone else, provides Hermione with a base of support for her personal quest. Through not only forming the club itself but also taking the lead in the two initial meetings, Hermione demonstrates a courage that serves her well in the climatic Department of Mysteries battle.

[16] Except for Harry and, of course, Dumbledore.

Though Hermione suspects that Harry's dream about Voldemort torturing Sirius in the Department of Mysteries is a trick (and is, in fact, correct), she nevertheless insists on going with Harry, saying "furiously," "'I'm not staying behind!'" when he plans to go on ahead with Ron (763). Hermione demands to be included when it seems as though she may be left out of this quest and proves to be an asset as always. When the small group of D.A. members[17] reaches the room of rotating doors, Hermione uses the Flagrate Charm to mark the doors that they have already opened.[18] Through her quick-thinking and use of logic to find the right path, Hermione demonstrates that she has developed her range of skills since the trio's first adventure in *Sorcerer's Stone*. After the group has encountered the Death Eaters and learned that the dream was indeed a trap, Hermione fights valiantly against them and in fact saves her own life. As they are being chased by a few Death Eaters, Hermione casts a silencing charm on one, which prevents him from uttering a spell. However, that Death Eater casts the spell non-verbally and makes "a sudden slashing movement with his wand from which [flies] a streak of what look[s] like purple flame"; it passes across Hermione's chest and then she crumples on the floor where she lies motionless (792). Though she cannot avoid injury, Hermione protects herself without waiting or even expecting any of the boys to do so for her. Through her knowledge and fast reaction time Hermione is able to become her own rescuer. She also sustains the most serious injury out of the group, as opposed to Ron, whose run-in with the brains is almost comical and juxtaposes the severity of Hermione's injury.[19] Ultimately, through her pursuit of information,

[17] The group includes Harry, Ron, Hermione, Neville, Ginny, and Luna.
[18] The use of this charm parallels the use of Hermione's signature blue-bell flames in *SS*. In the first book Hermione forgets to use magic when she needs to conjure flames, whereas now she uses this similar, fire-based spell to successfully navigate the Department.
[19] Hermione would never be defeated by a brain—literally or metaphorically. Thanks to my friend Lindsey Kerecz for pointing this out.

Hermione battles equally alongside her male counterparts and demonstrates that her empowerment comes from knowledge.

A lot of information is revealed throughout *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and a lot of Hermione's emotional maturity is revealed as well. While Harry is learning about Voldemort's history, he and his friends are also developing romantic relationships with one another. As we saw in *Goblet of Fire*, Hermione has already expressed her sexual interest and her emotional maturity through her relationship with Viktor. Ron, however, has yet to develop anything more than a crush on his brother's fiancée, Fleur.[20] As the first term of the school year progresses, it seems as though Ron and Hermione will finally become more than friends after a few years of "ANVIL-sized hints" ("Mugglenet").[21] In true Hermione/Ron fashion, the two are arguing, this time about Professor Slughorn's Christmas party, when Ron sneers "'Why don't you try hooking up with McLaggen'" because he feels excluded (*Half-Blood Prince* 282). Hermione replies, blushing, that "'I was *going* to ask you to come, but if you think it's that stupid then I won't bother!...obviously you'd rather I *hooked up with McLaggen*…'" (282). Realizing the mutual interest each has in the other, the argument ends and the two are both "flustered" by this new development, but Harry is "not really surprised" by it (283). Before Hermione and Ron can pursue this new romance, however, Ron becomes jealous upon hearing about Hermione having kissed Viktor over a year ago and feels insecure because, as his little sister Ginny says, he has "about as much experience as a twelve-year-old" (288). His insecurity and jealousy of others' relationships demonstrates Ron's own emotional and sexual immaturity. He treats a "bewildered Hermione with icy, sneering indifference," punishing her for her maturity and her own sexual experience (290).

[20] This is the same Fleur Delacour who competed in the Triwizard Tournament in *Goblet of Fire*. After completing her education Fleur returned to work at Gringotts Wizarding Bank where she met Bill.
[21] http://www.mugglenet.com/jkrinterview.shtml

Ron tries to compensate for his insecurity and inexperience by going out with the first girl to express interest in him, Lavender. After winning the Quidditch game, Ron "celebrates" by sloppily making out with Lavender in the common room, "wrapped so closely around [her] it was hard to tell whose hands were whose," in full view of everyone, including Hermione (300). This occurs mere minutes after Hermione accuses Ron and Harry of using a luck potion to help Ron perform better in the game; in this light Ron's reaction seems even more like compensation for his inabilities. Whereas Ron seems reckless in dealing with his needs and emotions, Hermione appears active and, at least, determined. She leaves and seeks refuge in a classroom, channeling her feelings through magic by conjuring yellow birds out of midair. Hermione does not burst into tears when Harry finds her but rather maintains her composure, even when Ron walks into the room pulling Lavender by the hand. In the ensuing "horrible, billowing silence" Hermione stares at Ron, "who refused to look at her"; as she slowly walks out of the room Hermione sends the twittering birds "speeding like a hail of fat golden bullets toward Ron, who yelped and covered his face with his hands" (302). Though perhaps this is not the most mature reaction, Hermione, unlike Ron, expresses her feelings and confronts the situation.

Weeks later Ron still takes a defensive and resentful tone, saying that "'[s]he can't complain…She snogged Krum. So she's found out someone wants to snog me too. Well, it's a free country. I haven't done anything wrong…I never promised Hermione anything... I mean, all right, I was going to go to Slughorn's Christmas party with her, but she never said…just as friends…I'm a free agent'" (304). Ron's inability to move past his insecurity directly contrasts with Hermione's self-confidence. Whereas Ron tries to rid himself of culpability for hurting his best friend by laying blame on her for kissing a boy, Hermione simply avoids a confrontation

with him. Through her refusal to apologize for something that she has never felt sorry for, Hermione reveals that she continues to be more emotionally mature than both Ron and Harry.

Though Hermione has no emotional conflict with Harry in this book, she does question his trust in the Half-Blood Prince's Potions book and expresses her suspicion of it often. For the first time in his school career Harry is performing better in Potions than Hermione, thanks to the alternate instructions in the second-hand book. Hermione demands to know how Harry has mixed the potion so well, but when he tells her to stir the liquid in a different direction she "snaps," "'No, no, the book says counterclockwise!'" (191). Her reaction appears to be an example of Hermione's over-reliance on the "inherent" truth of books; however, as she demonstrated in *Order of the Phoenix*, Hermione is capable of not only discerning the veracity of generally accepted knowledge but also critiquing it. The difference here is that the author of the notes scribbled in the margins is unknown. And Ginny reminds the trio of the trouble she got into when she trusted an old diary and it turned out to belong to Voldemort when he was in school.[22] Her father's advice, "Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can't see where it keeps its brain," rings true for her and Hermione (*Chamber of Secrets* 329). Though it seems that the book does not think on its own, the fact that the previous owner could be anyone, even Voldemort, presents a strong caution against following its instructions.

Hermione also takes issue with Harry's method of getting a good grade, later saying that "'it wasn't exactly your own work, was it?'" (*Half-Blood Prince* 192). Although Harry's life has by no means been easy, he receives privilege and partiality just for being "The Boy Who Lived." Hermione, on the other hand, has had to work hard for everything she has earned, especially

[22] In *Chamber of Secrets* Ginny confided in the diary, which responded and seemed to have a mind of its own. The diary grew strong by feeding off of Ginny's feelings and the soul of its owner possessed her for a time. As Dumbledore reveals later in *Half-Blood Prince*, this diary was a Horcrux- a darkly magical object that contains a piece of someone's soul, in this case, Voldemort's.

because she is Muggle-born. She recognizes that easier does not always mean better and that attaining knowledge takes hard work and dedication. Harry shows that he has yet to grasp this concept in his attempts to retrieve an important memory from Professor Slughorn. Dumbledore tells Harry that only he can get this memory because Slughorn is intent on hiding the truth. Neither Harry nor Ron comprehends how difficult obtaining the memory could be, and they decide that Harry should simply ask him for the memory after class. Hermione, however, has a more realistic view of the situation, saying that "'[h]e must be really determined to hide what really happened if Dumbledore couldn't get it out of him'" (373). Of course Harry tries the easy method and fails miserably; even after Hermione reminds him that "'You're going about this the wrong way…you can persuade Slughorn where other people can't. It's not a question of slipping him a potion, anyone could do that'" (449). And in fact Harry does rely on a potion to get the memory, the luck position Felix Felicis; Harry ingests the potion and simply "gets lucky." He attains the knowledge he seeks with little effort, and while this experience is not detrimental to anyone else, it provides an unsound basis for his belief that he can get want he needs without hard work.

In the end, Hermione is proven right: "Prince" was not a title but a last name, and he is a very dangerous character. But loyalty and solidarity take precedence over the petty issue of who was right in this situation. When the trio has to cope with Dumbledore's death and the continuing war against Voldemort, Hermione and Ron vow to stand by Harry's side. After Dumbledore's funeral, Harry announces that he will not come back to Hogwarts even if it does reopen, which contrasts with Hermione's statement a few lines earlier of "'I can't bear the idea that we might never come back'" (650). Hogwarts holds an important place in all their lives, but for Hermione the school represents her achievements and all the work she has done to get them.

Harry announces that he will find and destroy the remaining Horcruxes and then go on to kill Voldemort and Ron declares that "'We'll be there…we'll go with you wherever you're going'" (651). Though Harry tells them not to, Hermione reminds him that "'[y]ou said to us once before…that there was time to turn back if we wanted to. We've had time, haven't we?'" (651). Though Hogwarts is Hermione's second home and graduation her goal, she does not hesitate to stick with her best friends no matter where the rest of their journey may take them. Hermione reinforces the power of their bond by supporting and joining in Harry's quest even though it takes them away from school, her home and her safe space, and towards danger.

Hermione has become the strongest and most self aware character among the students at Hogwarts through her rebellion against cultural expectations for girls. Her manipulation of narrative tropes that contain girls—including the modesty trope, the nerdly girl transformation trope, the Cinderella trope, and the damsel in distress trope—protests such containment and reveals that these tropes are artificial. Throughout the novels she implements her intelligence and her logical abilities to gain equal status with her male friends. But when called to action, Hermione can transcend the role of nerdy girl to fight against the forces of oppression and darkness, from the enslavement of house-elves to the evils of Voldemort. As the narrative progresses, Hermione's maturity, sexuality, emotional development, and sense of self far surpass those of Harry and Ron; thus, Hermione displays a self-actualized personality to rival that of some adult witches and wizards. With the upcoming publication of the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Rowling has set up Hermione's character as necessary to the quest and to the aftermath of Voldemort's imminent defeat, so that she will again prove herself vital to the trio. Rowling has created a character who has taken on a life of her own, providing a venerable example of young female agency for a readership that may lack such noteworthy characters.

Works Cited

Adney, Karley Kristine. "From Books to Battle: Hermione's Quest for Knowledge in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*." *Topic: The Washington & Jefferson College Review*, 54. pp. 103-112.

Bertens, Hans. *Literary Theory: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Carey, Brycchan. "Hermione and the House-Elves: The Literary and Historical Contexts of J.K. Rowling's Antislavery Campaign." *Reading Harry Potter*. Giselle Liza Anatol, ed. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003. pp.103-115.

Dresang, Eliza T. "Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender." *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

Heilman, Elizabeth E. "Blue Wizards and Pink Witches: Representations of Gender Identity and Power." *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*. Elizabeth E. Heilman, ed. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Lydon, Christopher. J.K. Rowling Interview Transcript, *The Connection* (WBUR Radio). 12 October 1999. <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/1999/1099-connectiontransc2.htm#p3>.

Mayes-Elma, Ruthann. "A Feminist Literary Criticism Approach to Representations of Women's Agency in Harry Potter." *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 65:3 (2004 Sept).

Pender, Patricia. "*Mea Mediocritas*: Mary Sidney and the Early Modern Rhetoric of Modesty." *What is the New Rhetoric?* Susan E. Thomas, ed. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. New York: Scholastic, 1999.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. New York: Scholastic, 1999.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. New York: Scholastic, 2000.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. New York: Scholastic, 2003.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. New York: Scholastic, 2005.

Shary, Timothy. "The Nerdly Girl and Her Beautiful Sister." *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*. Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance, eds. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002.

Sweeney, Kathleen. "Supernatural Girls." *Afterimage* 33.5: 13-16. *Academic Search Premier*. 16 February 2007. <http://search.ebscohost.com>.

Trites, Roberta Seelinger. *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997.

Vickers, Nancy. "'The blazon of sweet beauty's best': Shakespeare's *Lucrece*." *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Patricia Parker, ed. New York: Routledge, 1986.