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The Wizarding Words of J. K. Rowling: Literary Merit in the Harry Potter Series

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THE WIZARDING WORDS OF J.K. ROWLING:
LITERARY MERIT IN THE HARRY POTTER SERIES

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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2014

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ABSTRACT

Since hitting bookshelves in 1997, the Harry Potter series has taken the popular culture world by storm in an unprecedented way, breaking sales records for both books and films, and dramatically increasing readership among young readers. Despite its immense and unique success, this series, like many other examples of pop culture, doesn't often receive the credit it deserves with respect to its literary merits. However, it is undeniable that the Potter books reflect many of the traits found in all great works of literature, including complex character development and abundant literary devices that elevate the intellectual level of the series.

Based on in-depth character studies of Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore and an examination of several literary devices found within the Potter series, one can easily see how Rowling's books are exemplary works of texts that are both popular and literary. Comparing the Potter books to classic literary works shows that, despite the books' primarily young audience, they contain literary elements seen in the world's greatest examples of literature and can therefore be seen as exemplary of literary merit.

Keywords: Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, literature, popular culture, literary merit

To my mom –
Who first traveled to Hogwarts with me in 1999
and is the constant source of magic in my life

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Finally, thank you to J.K. Rowling for writing the story that shaped my childhood and has made me who I am. This is for you.

VITA

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Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic.

Capable of both inflicting injury and remedying it.

– Albus Dumbledore, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*

INTRODUCTION

What qualities make a book a work of "literature"? Is it necessary for the book to cover a specific topic or be written in a certain style? The *Oxford Online Dictionary* defines literature as "written works, especially those considered of superior or lasting artistic merit," a definition which allows large room for interpretation ("Literature"). When we think of written works we might call literary, we usually first think of the "classics," anything from *Pride and Prejudice* to *The Great Gatsby* or *Great Expectations*. However, we also recognize more contemporary works as literary, especially from such authors as Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, and John Updike, just to name a few.

One genre of books that many are less inclined to denote as literary is the popular novel, a category that reaches a wide range of audiences and includes diverse writing styles. In recent years, for example, a variety of works with differing levels of merit have become bestsellers. These include anything from crowd-pleasing works like E L James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* to Pulitzer Prize-winning works like Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*. Popularity applies to such a wide range of books that it can certainly be difficult for readers to recognize popular fiction as literary, especially since this category features a number of less-than-profound works. However, this fact in no way means that popular

books cannot be literary, so readers must attempt to understand how a book can be defined as popular and literary at the same time.

One immensely popular work that I believe is also quite literary is the Harry Potter series, which has shaped nearly two decades of global culture. After its initial publication in Great Britain, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the first novel in J.K. Rowling's seven-book series, was published in the United States in 1998, followed by the publications of both *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in 1999 ("Author J.K. Rowling"). In 2000, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was the first book in the series to be simultaneously published in Great Britain, the U.S., and other countries, and the novel broke all previous records for book sales during the first weekend of publication. ("Author J.K. Rowling"). In fact, the early 2000s marked the beginning of the Harry Potter phenomenon with the first film being released in 2001, followed by the releases of the subsequent novels and films in the series.

Since the publication of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Rowling has sold over 400 million copies of her novels, which, according to Potter scholar John Granger, established the Potter series as "the shared text of our time" ("Harry is Here" 50). Not only have the books broken sales records, but the eight-film series is the most profitable movie franchise in history, and the series earned twelve Academy Award nominations during its ten-year lifespan (Vejvoda). In addition, Rowling has received countless awards for her Potter novels, including Author of the Year in 1998 and 1999, Children's Book of the Year in 2006, and a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008, all from the British Book Awards ("Author J.K. Rowling"). Rowling has also received several

honorary degrees from academic institutions in various nations including Harvard University, Dartmouth College, and the University of Edinburgh ("Author J.K. Rowling"). Aside from these awards and honors, the Harry Potter series has been credited with increasing children's readership, reestablishing the role of personal morals in contemporary literature, and incorporating political and social messages into her series ("Harry Potter"). However, the series has also been known to spark controversy for its content, most often due to the inclusion of magic in the story, which many Christians criticize due to the belief that it promotes witchcraft ("Harry Potter"). The various controversies surrounding the Potter books are cause enough to justify a more in-depth analysis of this pop culture phenomenon, and the truly spectacular success of both the books and films only gives us more reason to do so. No other example of pop culture has seen the immense popularity that Rowling's books continue to have; the Potter series has amassed incredible revenues – over twenty-four billion dollars among the books, films, and merchandise – and has even inspired its own amusement park, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida ("Total Harry Potter Franchise Revenue").

While the Potter series only began sixteen years ago, its effect on both contemporary literature and popular culture is essentially immeasurable. For this reason, we must recognize the phenomenal success of the series and attempt to comprehend it in a literary context that allows for its placement into the canon of "classic literature." While most have only recognized the Potter series for its sales, the literary elements of the series must also be commended. In the 4,100 pages of Rowling's books, there are countless examples of its "literary-ness," but for the sake of my argument, I will be examining two

aspects of the books that make them literary: Rowling's use of character development and literary devices. By employing these techniques, which have been used for centuries by literary authors across the world, Rowling has written novels that easily figure into the canon of "classic" literature, despite their bestseller status and young adult genre. For this very reason, the Potter books are in fact quite literary and represent an important new era in contemporary literature as the series has permeated every facet of pop culture.

CHAPTER 1

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

It is undeniable that all great literature includes characters who inspire extensive research and debate, and Rowling's characters are no exception. Over the course of the Potter books, Rowling introduces us to literally hundreds of characters of varying importance, but many of these characters serve a greater purpose than one might originally believe. Due to the narrative structure of the series, Rowling is able to develop her characters over seven novels, allowing her readers to truly understand the personalities of her characters. In his book *Elements of Literature*, author James Potter explains that we as readers perceive characters in the same way that we develop impressions of people in real life (4). However, Potter also writes that character development in literature is even more important than developing perceptions of others in real life because "in a literary work we are given the evidence by the author, who understands his characters much better than we understand people in real life, and who presents the evidence so as to direct our attention to his conception of the characters" (4). As readers know, the ways Rowling "directs our attention" can, at times, be misleading, but this effect helps to make her writing and characters more complex.

This unique development of characters over a series of novels gives readers a greater insight into many of the major characters in the Potter series, especially when coupled with Rowling's sometimes deceptive point of view. The most notable

characterization in the Potter series is actually not seen in the development of Harry as a protagonist, but in the development of Harry's antagonist, Voldemort. Though it is common for authors to offer some insight into the personal lives of their villains, rarely do readers find a villain's story so developed as to allow us to see moments in said villain's life ranging from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, as Rowling does with Voldemort.

Rowling also provides her readers with similar histories for other major characters, like Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape. Though we are introduced to these characters in Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*, Rowling does not present us with the true nature of each of these characters until the conclusion of her series, a choice that ultimately expands the complexity of her narrative. Each of Rowling's novels builds on those which come before it, offering deeper perspectives into her characters. While some of these perspectives may serve just to elaborate on the nature of each character, others are of vital importance to the overarching story. One example of Rowling's game-changing characterizations is seen in the ever-elusive Severus Snape.

Severus Snape

From the moment he meets Professor Snape, Harry displays general disdain for every moment spent with the greasy-haired Potions master, a feeling that appears to be mutual. Harry's first impression of Snape is a lasting one; during the opening feast at Hogwarts, Harry looks to the High Table where he sees "a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose, and sallow skin," and when Snape looks into Harry's eyes, "a sharp, hot pain shot across the scar on Harry's forehead" (126). From this moment, Harry distrusts

Snape. Throughout Book One, Harry suspects Snape to be the person attempting to steal Nicholas Flamel's titular stone, "a legendary substance with astonishing powers [that] will transform any metal into pure gold [and] produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal" (220). In fact, Harry is always quick to assume the worst of Snape as he sees the Potions professor as a perpetual enemy, regardless of Dumbledore's repeated trust in Snape. In the first book alone, Harry is ready to accuse Snape of hexing Harry's broomstick during a Quidditch match (190), bullying Professor Quirrell because of Snape's own desire for Quirrell's teaching position (226), conspiring with Voldemort to steal the Sorcerer's Stone for the Dark Lord's return (260), and generally treating Harry and his friends unfairly (139). While the latter will, in fact, be an offense Snape is guilty of time and again, it is also Harry's only veritable accusation.

In fact, though he will continue to have difficulty trusting Snape, Harry realizes by the conclusion of *Sorcerer's Stone* that Snape was actually trying to protect Harry all along (289). This is the first of many occasions when Harry is forced to rethink his distrust of the Potions master. All of Harry's aforementioned accusations were incorrect; in reality, Snape was attempting to help Harry by counteracting the hex Quirrell placed on Harry's broomstick (189) and "bullying" Quirrell into admitting he was working with Voldemort (289). During Harry's final faceoff with Quirrell, as the two battle for possession of the Sorcerer's Stone, Quirrell explains Snape's true goals to Harry, causing Harry to ask incredulously, "Snape was trying to *save* me?" (289). Even when faced with the reality that Quirrell was the villain all along, Harry finds it difficult to see Snape as his protector.

Harry continues to struggle with the idea that Snape is on his side throughout the

series, and the gradual release of information about Snape's past adds to the complex nature of this character and his relationship to Harry. In Book Three, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry learns that Snape and Harry's parents were all Hogwarts' students at the same time, a connection that will prove significant later in the series (356). During his first journey into Dumbledore's Pensieve, a device which allows wizards to travel into each other's memories in Book Four, *Goblet of Fire*, Harry confirms his suspicions that Snape was once a Death Eater, the name given to Voldemort's devoted followers (590). Harry inadvertently dives into one of Dumbledore's memories and finds himself sitting in on the hearing of a captured Death Eater who outs Snape as a fellow Voldemort supporter in order to lessen his own sentence (590). Snape's previous loyalty to Voldemort is enough to convince Harry of Snape's true character, despite Dumbledore's insistence in this memory that Snape's allegiance has changed (590-1). In this scene, Rowling again presents information about Snape that confounds readers who find it difficult to categorize Snape. Dumbledore's implicit trust should be enough to prove Snape's true nature, but Harry's unflinching suspicion only adds to readers' confusion.

As Harry begins to learn more about Snape's past in Book Five, *Order of the Phoenix*, he also learns about his own family, and some of this information is not as pleasing as Harry might hope (650). In one of the most informative sequences in the series, Harry is inadvertently exposed to "Snape's Worst Memory" as the chapter title explains (640). Harry's time spent studying Occlumency – a skill he must develop to keep Voldemort from entering his mind – with Snape is often fruitless and frustrating, and when Harry notices Dumbledore's abandoned Pensieve in Snape's office, he finds himself tempted to see what Snape had been thinking about (639). Upon entering the memory,

Harry quickly spots Snape, followed by Harry's father, James, and his friends Lupin, Sirius, and Peter Pettigrew (641). After following James, Lupin, Sirius, and Pettigrew to a space on the Hogwarts' grounds, Harry notices that his father seems to enjoy attracting attention (645). As readers know, Harry was born into fame he never desired, and the idea that his father sought attention from his friends is disheartening to Harry.

Unfortunately, this is just the beginning of Harry's newly disillusioned impression of his father, as this moment is quickly followed by James and Sirius taunting Snape both verbally and physically (645-7). The altercation escalates to the point that James bleeds from a hex sent by Snape, and Snape hangs humiliated upside-down, much to the amusement of those surrounding the scene (647). Lily, Harry's mother, finally comes to Snape's rescue and persuades James to release his hold on Snape. Feeling embarrassed, Snape gathers himself and says, "I don't need help from filthy little Mudbloods like her!" (648). "Mudblood," of course, is the Wizarding equivalent of a racial slur, so this comment has a lasting impact on Lily's and Snape's relationship, but Harry will not understand Snape's regrets about this moment until Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*.

Once again, this small insight into Snape's past allows readers to add to the inventory of information concerning his personality, and we again find ourselves confused as to his true nature. Snape's dislike of James Potter seems a bit more justified after this scene, and it is clear that Snape's feelings for James have influenced his feelings for Harry. This journey into the Pensieve also paints a picture of young Snape as an awkward outcast, a boy who could understandably become the cold and unforgiving teacher Harry has come to know in the present. In Snape, Rowling has created neither a villain nor a hero, but someone in between. In this way, Rowling's character is similar to

some very prominent literary figures like F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield, and Zora Neale Hurston's Janie Crawford. Like Gatsby, Snape dedicates his life to an unrequited love and creates a façade that hides his true motives. Snape and Caulfield share generally cynical dispositions that mask their better qualities, like Snape's devotion and Caulfield's intelligence. Hurston's Janie Crawford struggles under the control of the men in her life and is often caught between her own desires and the desires of those around her, and Snape suffers similarly when working for both Dumbledore and Voldemort. These literary protagonists are like Snape in their liminal status, a status that makes them too imperfect to be heroes, but not flawed enough to be considered antiheroes or antagonists. The complex nature of these characters heightens their stories by adding layers to their personalities. By creating characters who are not easily categorized like Snape, Rowling not only enriches her story, but also provides readers with characters who are similar to some of literature's most complicated literary icons.

The most important revelations about Snape come within the last one hundred pages of Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*, in the aftermath of Snape's death. After watching Voldemort's snake, Nagini, attack Snape, Harry runs to Snape's side, and Snape offers Harry a memory to take to the Pensieve (658). After muttering the words "Look...at...me...", Snape dies with his eyes locked on Harry's (658). Harry quickly makes his way to the Pensieve in Dumbledore's office, and the revealed information that follows changes everything Harry has ever known about his least favorite Hogwarts teacher (662). The memory begins on a playground, where two young girls interact, and a young boy lurks behind bushes, watching the girls (663). The girls are Lily and Petunia Evans,

and the boy is Snape, helping Harry realize that Snape was a longtime friend of his mother's, a fact he had not known previously (663-70).

Harry then watches several moments at Hogwarts, where Lily's and Snape's friendship grew more complicated after being sorted into opposing houses (672-3). It appears that Snape has developed a crush on Lily and is jealous that James Potter might have similar feelings (674). However, Lily is disgusted at the thought of James, which lessens Snape's concerns (674-5). Again the scene changes, but this time Harry finds himself in a more familiar memory: the scene he first witnessed in Book Five, *Order of the Phoenix*, when James and Snape fight and Lily comes to Snape's defense, only to be called a Mudblood by her friend (675). Unlike his previous viewing of this memory, though, Harry watches a follow-up to the incident in which Snape unsuccessfully attempts to apologize to Lily for his insult, and the two go their separate ways (676). The next scene change offers a bigger time lapse than the previous ones, as readers see Snape during his time as a Death Eater begging for Dumbledore's help in keeping Voldemort from killing Lily and her family (676). When Dumbledore questions Snape's commitment, Snape says he will do "anything" to protect the Potters (678).

The next time Snape meets Dumbledore, James and Lily Potter have been killed, leaving Snape to mourn his beloved Lily's death (678). The following is one of the most important scenes in the entire Potter series, when we see Snape for who he truly is:

The hilltop faded, and Harry stood in Dumbledore's office, and something was making a terrible sound, like a wounded animal. Snape was slumped forward in a chair and Dumbledore was standing over him, looking grim. After a moment or two, Snape raised his face, and he looked

like a man who had lived a hundred years of misery since leaving the wild hilltop.

"I thought...you were going...to keep her...safe...."

"She and James put their faith in the wrong person," said Dumbledore.

"Rather like you, Severus. Weren't you hoping that Lord Voldemort would spare her?"

Snape's breathing was shallow.

"Her boy survives," said Dumbledore.

With a tiny jerk of the head, Snape seemed to flick off an irksome fly.

"Her son lives. He has her eyes, precisely her eyes. You remember the shape and color of Lily Evans's eyes, I am sure?"

"DON'T!" bellowed Snape. "Gone...dead..."

"Is this remorse, Severus?"

"I wish... I wish *I* were dead...."

"And what use would that be to anyone?" said Dumbledore coldly. "If you loved Lily Evans, if you truly loved her, then your way forward is clear."

Snape seemed to peer through the haze of pain, and Dumbledore's words appeared to take a long time to reach him.

"What – what you do mean?"

"You know how and why she died. Make sure it was not in vain. Help me protect Lily's son."

"He does not need protection. The Dark Lord has gone –"

"The Dark Lord will return, and Harry Potter will be in terrible danger when he does."

There was a long pause, and slowly Snape regained control of himself, mastering his own breathing. At last he said, "Very well. Very well. But never – never tell, Dumbledore! This must be between us! Swear it! I cannot bear...especially Potter's son...I want your word!"

"My word, Severus, that I shall never reveal the best of you?"

Dumbledore sighed, looking down into Snape's ferocious, anguished face.

"If you insist..." (678-9)

Following this memory, we see glimpses of Snape during his time as Harry's teacher (679), and one very informative memory in which Snape agrees to Dumbledore's request to kill him rather than making Draco Malfoy complete the task as assigned by Voldemort (683).

The last truly revealing memory in this chapter comes when Snape learns that, in order for Voldemort to be killed, Harry must die as well, because Voldemort inadvertently made Harry a Horcrux – a device which allows a wizard to store a piece of his fractured soul after committing murder so that the wizard in question can essentially become immortal (*Half-Blood* 498) – on the night Voldemort tried to kill him (685-7). This information causes Snape to reveal, finally, the reason he has taken on such a difficult task and inspired trust in Dumbledore (687). Snape is furious that Dumbledore has "been raising [Harry] like a pig for the slaughter," and when Dumbledore asks Snape if he has "grown to care for the boy," Snape answers by producing a Patronus Charm in the shape of a doe (687). This doe, as readers will know, represents Lily Potter, the

woman whom Snape loved so much that he dedicated his life to protecting the son she shared with a man Snape despised. Dumbledore is moved to tears by Snape's demonstration, asking, "After all this time?" to which Snape simply responds, "Always" (687).

After seven books and four thousand pages, Rowling finally reveals to readers Snape's true character. The man whom Harry always saw as an enemy has actually been his most vigilant guardian all along. Regardless of Snape's disdain for Harry's father, his lifelong love for Lily was enough to inspire him to protect her only son from harm, a cause he eventually died for. Because of this memory, Harry also realizes he must sacrifice himself in order to overcome Voldemort, a sacrifice similar to the one Snape made to protect Harry for so many years.

Before the release of this final novel in the series, it appeared all hope was lost for Snape since readers had last seen him as the man who betrayed and murdered his most loyal champion, Dumbledore. However, Rowling clearly had much bigger plans for this character. Rowling has certainly developed other characters in unexpected ways, but no other character is developed in such a complex and dramatic fashion as Snape. The beauty of Rowling's narrative is that Harry and his readers come to the realization of Snape's loyalty at the same moment, and we therefore share the experience of reveling in this knowledge.

It is no surprise that, in the *Deathly Hallows'* epilogue, which flashes forward nineteen years, we learn that Harry has named his second son Albus Severus. Despite Harry's long-lasting disdain for Snape, he named one of his sons after the man, demonstrating the change-of-heart Harry experienced upon learning of Snape's true

nature (758). Harry cannot thank Snape for his vigilant protection and devotion to Lily, so instead, he honors him by naming his son for “the bravest man [he] ever knew” (758).

In retrospect, the knowledge that Snape spent his life loving Lily Potter adds a touching beauty to his final moments before death, when he asks Harry to look at him as he dies (658). If there is one thing we know about Harry's appearance – apart from that scar on his forehead – it is that he has his mother's eyes, a comment Harry hears from countless characters throughout the series. Does it not seem appropriate then, despite the animosity between Snape and Harry, that Snape would want his last vision before death to be the eyes of the woman he loved his entire life? Snape's dying moment is often only appreciated when rereading this scene because it comes before we know who has motivated him all this time. For a man who always seemed cold and uninterested in developing relationships with others, Snape is actually one of Rowling's most romantic: he dies for love even when that love is long lost.

The development of Snape's character over the course of the series allows readers to understand him more clearly, and Rowling takes the necessary time to reveal Snape's true identity to readers. In Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*, readers never could have imagined that Snape would be one of the series' most noble and empathetic characters. However, by gradually developing Snape's identity, Rowling is not only able to more fully develop his character, but also make the overall series more complex.

Albus Dumbledore

Albus Dumbledore, the wise and loving Hogwarts' Headmaster, could be seen as one of the most consistent characters in the Potter series as Dumbledore seems to be a

benevolent leader and sage, but gradual revelations throughout the series point to many dark moments in Dumbledore's past. The Dumbledore we come to know and admire is a man who loves Harry unconditionally, and at times he seems to be the only person who Harry can trust to understand his problems. However, as we learn in books six and seven, the real Dumbledore is a troubled man who has continually struggled with a thirst for power, a surprising trait to those of us who become accustomed to the gentle, wise, and humble Dumbledore who pervades the series. With this imperfect mentor, Rowling has created another well-rounded character.

As James W. Thomas, author of *Repotting Harry Potter*, writes, the conclusion of *Sorcerer's Stone* presents the first of many installments of what he calls "the wit and wisdom of Albus Dumbledore" when Dumbledore comes to Harry's hospital bedside (Thomas 41). Harry asks Dumbledore why Voldemort is so determined to kill Harry (298). Dumbledore responds by saying, "Alas, the first thing you ask me, I cannot tell you. Not today. Not now. You will know, one day...put it from your mind for now, Harry. When you are older...when you are ready, you will know" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 299). Not only is this one of Rowling's most important bits of foreshadowing, it also conveys Dumbledore's desire to protect Harry from the evils of the world.

At this point in the series, Dumbledore serves as the loving adult figure Harry has never had in his life, and Dumbledore quickly becomes one of Harry's most consistent mentors as the challenges he faces become increasingly difficult. While Harry must ultimately face his challenges alone, his relationship with Dumbledore can be easily compared to the relationship between Frodo and Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy or that of Edmund Dantès and Abbé Faria in Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte*

Cristo. Dumbledore is also similar to Lois Lowry's Giver, C.S. Lewis's Professor Kirke, and Arthur's Merlin, all of whom serve as mentors to their books' protagonists, showing that Rowling's creation of Dumbledore is similar to a variety of great literary characters.

At the end of Book Two, *Chamber of Secrets*, when Harry has once again faced a challenge far beyond his age by fighting the basilisk and a young Tom Riddle to save Ginny Weasley in the Chamber of Secrets, Dumbledore offers Harry some insight into his connection to Voldemort (332-4). Harry's faceoff with a sixteen-year-old Tom Riddle in the Chamber has unsettled Harry as he has come to recognize some characteristics the two share (333). Here, Dumbledore imparts some information that will be crucial to Harry in the future: "Unless I'm much mistaken, [Voldemort] transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar. Not something he intended to do, I'm sure" (332-3). Rowling's introduction of the idea that Voldemort inadvertently left a piece of himself in Harry this early in the series shows the layered nature of her story, since we will not learn the significance of this fact until the end of the final book in the series (*Deathly Hallows* 687). This information not only works to develop the plot of the series, but it is also quite revealing of Harry and Dumbledore as characters. When Harry is again faced with information beyond his years, his youth and naiveté are graciously balanced by Dumbledore's wisdom and affection for Harry as he comes closer to facing the difficult truth about his identity.

In the concluding moments of Book Two, *Chamber of Secrets*, Rowling also conveys the important thematic concept of individual choice when Dumbledore says, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (333). This piece of wisdom could serve as Harry's motto throughout the series and also

represents Dumbledore's complicated and conflicted nature, which becomes more apparent later in the series. The theme of choice is seen in the contrast Rowling draws between individual choice and fate, a concept that can be seen in referring to Harry as "The Chosen One." This title is forced upon Harry by an act of fate, not by any personal choice. This contrast again echoes Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, a book commonly recognized as one of the greatest among children's literature. In Lowry's novel, protagonist Jonas is a chosen one of sorts as he takes on a new position as the community's "receiver," that is the person who holds the memories of his or her community. In both of these stories, the lead characters have been selected for an immensely important task and seek advice from a wise mentor who describes the importance of making choices and how they can affect the surrounding world. Rowling's juxtaposition of individual choice and fate could also be seen as a contrast between free will and fate, a theme that can also be found in such literature as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, or Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. These thematic elements make Rowling's story not only more complex, but also comparable to many great literary works.

The fifth book in the series, *Order of the Phoenix*, marks the introduction of some of Dumbledore's many faults, traits that make him a much more complicated character. In *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry faces unexpected challenges due to the backlash from a public in denial about the return of the Dark Lord (217). For the first time since Harry was accused of being the heir of Slytherin three years earlier (*Chamber of Secrets* 196), Harry is publicly ridiculed and denounced, and Dumbledore, one of Harry's only remaining allies, is notoriously absent for the majority of Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts (*Order of the Phoenix* 217), beginning with his hasty exit from Harry's hearing at the

Ministry of Magic (150-1). Harry's persecution in the Wizarding community begins when he is expelled from Hogwarts for using magic to defend himself and his cousin from a dementor attack (18), but Dumbledore is able to clear Harry of all charges before leaving without speaking to him (150-1). This marks the beginning of Harry's communication deficit with Dumbledore which continues throughout the book and again presents us with an instance of Dumbledore's imperfection. Rather than creating a model mentor, Rowling has written a more realistic and three-dimensional character with significant faults. Though Dumbledore's mistakes are frustrating for readers, they add to his complicated nature and make him more reminiscent of other imperfect literary figures like Abbé Faria or the Giver.

In a time when it would seem Harry most needs Dumbledore, Dumbledore chooses to send Harry to others for help rather than facing Harry himself. Dumbledore is the force behind Harry's Occlumency lessons with Snape (518), does not come to Harry's rescue when his conflicts with Dolores Umbridge begin (246), and deliberately leaves Hogwarts when the Minister of Magic authorizes Umbridge to usurp his own authority (622). These moments in the series highlight Dumbledore's weaknesses and add depth to his character. Dumbledore is a flawed man and nowhere near perfect, showing that Rowling's story does not take place in a black-and-white world, but rather one in which even the most noble of characters is flawed.

The reason for Dumbledore's absence and notable weakness throughout *Order of the Phoenix* is revealed in the final chapters of the novel when he shares with Harry why Voldemort is so determined to kill him: a prophecy made at the time of Harry's birth says that "the person who has the only chance of conquering the Lord Voldemort for good

was born at the end of July.... This boy would be born to parents who had already defied Voldemort three times" (841). For Harry's sake, the most important information contained in the prophecy states that "either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives" (841). As Dumbledore recounts the choices he made over many years to keep Harry safe, he also reveals an important characteristic in himself: his immense fondness for Harry (838). Dumbledore, knowing what he must eventually ask Harry to do, says, "I cared about you too much...I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than the lives that might be lost if the plan failed" (838). This confession exposes one of Dumbledore's vulnerabilities: his affinity for love and compassion, especially where Harry is concerned. In this way, Dumbledore again mirrors Lowry's Giver, who struggles with his mission of imparting dark and difficult information upon someone he cares for. Again, a weakness in Dumbledore's character has been exposed, but this one makes readers more understanding of Dumbledore's past mistakes. His imperfections add to the fully drawn nature of his character while also likening him to some of literature's greatest mentors.

The majority of Book Six, *Half-Blood Prince*, finds Harry spending his free time with the Headmaster as the two work together to retrieve as much information as possible about Voldemort's past. Much of this research is spent in pursuit of a specific memory in which a Hogwarts professor explained the nature of Horcruxes to a teenage Tom Riddle, who seems intent upon creating seven of these evil devices (498). The hunt for Horcruxes eventually takes Harry and Dumbledore to a location from Voldemort's youth where they find a locket believed to be one of Voldemort's Horcruxes (567). Because the locket is

magically concealed within a liquid-filled basin, Dumbledore takes it upon himself to drink the contents of the basin and makes Harry promise to force Dumbledore to drink the liquid if he hesitates (570). This process is painful for both Dumbledore and Harry; at times, Dumbledore screams, "'It's all my fault...Please make it stop, I know I did it all wrong...I want to die!...KILL ME!'" (572-3). This is Harry's first glimpse at a weakened Dumbledore, a man with a much more troubled mind than he has ever let on (572), making another of Rowling's characters fallible and, therefore, more realistic.

When Harry and Dumbledore return to Hogwarts where the Dark Mark shines above the Astronomy tower (581), Dumbledore sends Harry to wake Snape, but his mission is halted when Dumbledore realizes Draco Malfoy is already waiting for him, and he is soon joined by Snape and other Death Eaters (583-4). Before Draco can complete his assigned task of killing the Headmaster, Dumbledore turns to Snape, who "gazed for a moment at Dumbledore, and there was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of [Snape's] face" (595). Then, to the surprise of Harry and readers alike, Dumbledore says, "'Severus...please...'" causing Snape to send the Killing Curse at Dumbledore (595-6). The death of the beloved Headmaster comes as a shock, and Harry is left without the guidance of his long-time mentor as he prepares to enter the final stages of his fight against Voldemort. This somber ending of Book Six, *Half-Blood Prince* sets the dark tone for the final installment of the series in which Harry faces immense challenges in order to overcome his nemesis.

As Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*, begins, Harry finds himself attempting to move past the loss of Dumbledore in order to complete his mission of finding and destroying the Horcruxes. The release of Dumbledore's biography, *The Life and Lies of Albus*

Dumbledore, causes Harry to question everything he thought he knew about Dumbledore, especially when the book's content proves to be rather shocking (353-9). Dumbledore's family history is darker than Harry had ever realized, including a Muggle-attacking father who died in prison and a brother with whom Dumbledore had a long-lasting conflict over Dumbledore's mistreatment of his friends and family in his quest for power (359). After the death of his mother, Dumbledore was forced to return home to care for his sister, Ariana, who did not possess the same magical abilities as her family members (355). It was during this time at home when Dumbledore first met and befriended Gellert Grindelwald, an infamous wizard known for his desire to oppress all Muggles under magical authority (355-6). Needless to say, these facts about Dumbledore's past were previously unknown to Harry, and he spends a large portion of this book questioning how well he ever knew the Headmaster.

However, the chapter "King's Cross" at the end of *Deathly Hallows* allows Harry to achieve closure with the doubt he has been feeling. After dying at Voldemort's hand, Harry awakens in what he comes to recognize as a dream-like version of King's Cross train station in London, where he meets Dumbledore (707). In this moment, Harry and Dumbledore are equals, and Dumbledore finally feels comfortable telling Harry all the things he had previously left unsaid, from the reason why Harry had to let Voldemort kill him to the thirst for power and other inner demons Dumbledore battled in his youth (709-20). While Dumbledore admits to having searched for the Deathly Hallows because of his desire to become a more powerful wizard, Harry never sought these items for personal gain, choosing instead to search for the Horcruxes he had to destroy in order to defeat Voldemort (720). In this instance, we see that Harry has made the difficult and

selfless choice that Dumbledore never could; Harry was always more interested in the defeat of Voldemort than making himself a better wizard, while Dumbledore fell victim to his desire to become more powerful. These insights into Dumbledore's past show the malvolence of his character and the many mistakes that undoubtedly inspired his haunting pleas at the end of Book Six, *Half-Blood Prince*.

It becomes obvious in Book Seven that, though Dumbledore is a character we come to know and trust almost immediately in the series, he is in no way perfect, and Rowling takes care to reveal the necessary insights into his character over the course of the series to make him so complex. When we meet Dumbledore in Book One, *Sorter's Stone*, it seems quite plausible that he will remain a distant-but-loving figure during Harry's school years, checking in often enough to develop a bond with Harry. However, Dumbledore quickly becomes one of the most important figures in Harry's life, a man who has lived through experiences good and bad, and who so desperately wants to protect Harry that he willingly sacrifices himself to allow Harry to continue in his fight against Voldemort.

These developments present readers and critics with the information necessary to understand that Dumbledore functions as much more than a simple, two-dimensional figure, again calling to mind other literary mentors like Gandalf, The Giver, Professor Kirke, or Abbé Faria—whose presence change the entire course of their stories. The development of layered characters is essential to any great literary work, and Dumbledore is just another example of a Rowling character whose complexity can only be appreciated when studying the series as a whole.

Snape and Dumbledore are easily two of Rowling's most complex characters who

prove her incredible talent for characterization in a series that is often written off as juvenile. Critics such as Yale professor and literary critic Harold Bloom, who wrote in *The Boston Globe* in 2003 that "clichés and dead metaphors" control Rowling's writing, or writer A.S. Byatt, who argued in *The New York Times* that the Potter books are "for people whose imaginative lives are confined to TV cartoons and the exaggerated...mirror-worlds of soaps, reality TV, and celebrity gossip," are obviously dismissive of the literary merits of the series (Byatt). It should be noted, however, that both of these comments were written in 2003, when only the first five books of the series had been published, and Bloom's comments address only his feelings on Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*. To these and other critics of the series, it must be said that the Potter series is best when viewed in its entirety; only after Harry's understanding of such fallible characters as Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore increases can we fully appreciate them. In fact, the layered nature of Rowling's characters is best exemplified through analysis of the complete Potter series because each book builds upon its predecessors and allows Rowling's characters to become three-dimensional. In this respect, neither the complexity of Rowling's characters nor the literary merits of her writing can be understated.

CHAPTER 2

LITERARY DEVICES

Of the many tools at an author's disposal, literary devices can be some of the most effective in elevating a story into the literary canon. These are techniques which have been used across centuries by authors of all genres and traits. While Rowling employs many literary devices in her series, some of these techniques are worthy of analysis when considering the literary merit of the overall series.

Allusion

According to *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, allusion occurs when an author makes "an indirect reference to a text, myth, event, or person" outside the context of the given work (Knapp). Rowling uses this technique in various ways throughout the Potter series, and the complexity of the allusions seems to grow as the series progresses.

In Minerva McGonagall, for example, we find a rather obvious reference to Roman mythology. In Roman mythology, Minerva is the goddess of wisdom and war, and the sacred animal used to symbolize her is referred to as "the owl of Minerva," representing her ties to knowledge ("Minerva"). Professor McGonagall's last name further links her to Minerva, since its Celtic root means "son of the bravest" ("We Teachers"). The characteristics of wisdom and bravery are certainly mirrored in Rowling's wise teacher. Professor McGonagall is both Harry's teacher and mentor,

second only to Dumbledore when Harry desires advice from the Hogwarts' staff. In Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*, McGonagall recruits Harry for the Gryffindor Quidditch team after she catches Harry flying after Draco Malfoy when he steals Neville Longbottom's Remembrall (151). In Book Five, *Order of the Phoenix*, McGonagall advises Harry on his class schedule and career aspirations when he expresses interest in becoming an Auror after leaving Hogwarts (662). In Book Six, *Half-Blood Prince*, McGonagall unofficially takes over at Hogwarts after Dumbledore's death (626), and exhibits her characteristic bravery in Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*, when she is one of the first to rally troops to fight Voldemort in the Battle of Hogwarts (600). Like her mythological counterpart, McGonagall is a strategic, dependable woman who can be consistently relied upon by those who surround her. On matters of both intellectual and emotional wisdom, Minerva McGonagall is quite similar to her Roman namesake, both women known for their abilities to provide guidance and intelligence, proving Rowling's deliberate choice in naming this character.

Another reference to Greek mythology occurs in Fluffy, Hagrid's three-headed dog who appears in Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*. In terms of physicality, Fluffy is conspicuously similar to Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards the gates to Hades in Greek mythology. Fluffy's purpose in *Sorcerer's Stone* is similar since he is just one of many of the guards in place to protect the Stone from Voldemort's hands (160). The connection between Fluffy and Cerberus cannot be denied, and it certainly influences readers to study Rowling's writing in a mythological context.

These allusions bring to mind other works of literature that have made similar allusions to mythological characters. Direct references to Cerberus appear in such classics

as Dante's *Inferno*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Shakespeare's *Love's Labor Lost*. In more contemporary literature, Sylvia Plath makes reference to Cerberus in her poem "Fever 103°," and Eudora Welty alludes to it in her short story "A Visit of Charity."

Rowling's writing is also full of allusions to 20th century European history, which become apparent later in the Potter series as we see the narrative grow darker. Not until Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*, do we ever get concrete information about the time period during which the story takes place, but when Harry visits his parents' graves in Godric's Hollow, we see that they died October 31, 1981 (328). To Potterphiles, this time stamp is significant in terms of the historical context of the series. In Book Two, *Chamber of Secrets* we learn that the last time the Chamber was opened was fifty years before, and, of course, the perpetrator was a teenage Tom Riddle (312). Since we know that Harry was born in the year of his parents' deaths and is twelve years old in *Chamber of Secrets*, we know the book takes place in 1992 (5). A fifty-year flashback puts us in the early 1940s at the height of World War II, creating a connection between the events in the Wizarding world and European history, especially when we look at the numerous references to history that make this allusion more concrete.

If we examine the entire series against a backdrop of World War II, it is easy to notice similarities between the Death Eaters, Voldemort's most loyal followers, and the Schutzstaffel or SS, the Nazi faction responsible for overseeing the concentration camp system ("SS"). The SS believed themselves to be the "racially elite," a sentiment that is shared by the Death Eaters and can be seen in such moments as the opening chapter of Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*, when they murder Hogwarts's Muggle Studies professor (12). It is also notable that the SS's alliterative title is echoed in many of Rowling's

characters – Severus Snape, Salazar Slytherin, and Stan Shunpike, to name a few. Not only do these characters share the same initials as the SS, they also, at one time or another, share ideals similar to the SS; Snape and Shunpike were both Death Eaters at different times in their lives, and Slytherin's beliefs about the superiority of pure-bloods inspired many of Voldemort's own beliefs.

We can also see a connection to World War II in the character of Gellert Grindelwald, a childhood friend of Dumbledore's who came to be known as a very formidable dark wizard (*Deathly Hallows* 355). Grindelwald's power was at its highest during Voldemort's teenage years in the 1940s. It is easy to imagine Grindelwald as a fictional Adolf Hitler and Voldemort as a member of the Hitler youth, learning his affinity for a racial prejudice that led him to try to eliminate what he believed to be the "lesser" race: the Muggles, or the non-magic population.

These connections are subtle and likely to go unnoticed by casual readers, but they also exemplify Rowling's desire to comment on history through fiction. We know that Rowling's world is a fantasy, but she also creates a world that echoes reality. This technique calls to mind other great literary works like George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or *1984*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, novels which bring historical events into a fictional realm. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell uses anarchic farm animals to represent historical leaders like Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, and in *1984*, Orwell presents a dystopian world led by Big Brother, another nod to life in the U.S.S.R. under Stalin. Heller's *Catch-22* is a satirical take on World War II, focusing on the contradictory elements of war that create a no-win situation. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood also creates a dystopian world in which women are subject to

those who hold power in society, and the novel's themes hint at historical events in 20th century America such as the feminist movement and the rise of the Christian right. The use of fiction to represent historical truths is not uncommon, and the fact that Rowling also employs this technique shows that her story goes deeper than a children's fantasy. Rowling's uses of allusions only serve to elevate her books by literary standards, a technique that makes her deserving of placement among the greatest writers in history.

Controlling Metaphor

Another literary device Rowling uses throughout the Potter series is the controlling metaphor. As defined by *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, controlling metaphors are those that "dominate or organize" an entire work, a technique which is most consistently seen throughout the Potter series in the form of Rowling's book titles. Because the titles of the seven books follow the same basic form – "Harry Potter and the..." followed by the name of an entity significant to each individual novel – readers can immediately identify what location, object, or entity will be most relevant to each individual book in the series. However, Rowling does not just use these titular hints to provide a glimpse into the story, but also to represent greater elements that will affect Harry through each book.

In Book One, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, for example, Harry is first introduced to the Wizarding world, but when he learns of Voldemort and suspects he is trying to steal the Stone, Harry is faced with the darkness that pervades the magical community (259). In this way, the Stone symbolizes the enticing surface and dark underbelly of the Wizarding world, both of which Harry will come to know well. The

Sorcerer's Stone is a magical device with a power that Harry – who is just coming to understand the abilities of wizards – finds both tempting and disarming, and these are emotions he continues to grapple with in reference to the magical community. The Stone is not just an item of primary concern over the course of *Sorcerer's Stone*; it is also a metaphor for the difficult life Harry has stepped into by recognizing his magical abilities, and the duality of the Stone serves as a fitting introduction for Harry to the multifaceted Wizarding world.

In Book Two, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Rowling again uses her title to represent not only a tangible place – the chamber – but also a slightly abstract concept that affects Harry's life throughout the novel. As readers know, the real Chamber of Secrets refers to a hidden location at Hogwarts created by one of the school's cofounders, Salazar Slytherin, to conceal a basilisk that can only be summoned by the heir of Slytherin himself (317). Though Harry is not Slytherin's heir, he does have the ability to speak Parseltongue because it was unintentionally imparted on him by Slytherin's true heir, Voldemort (332). This ability is enough to allow Harry entrance into the Chamber of Secrets where he speaks to a sixteen-year-old Tom Riddle who informs Harry about the many characteristics the two share (311). This scene gives the title more resonance as we realize that the Chamber of Secrets is the location where Harry learns new information – secrets – about himself, causing us to think of Harry himself as his own "Chamber of Secrets." In this book, Harry is exposed to many of his own previously unknown abilities and traits, showing that the secrets contained within the Chamber are much bigger and more numerous than the existence of the basilisk (309-14). By choosing a title with multiple meanings and implications, Rowling forces readers to consider how

the titles of her books serve as metaphors for the action that occurs in them. Not only do Rowling's titles give us a small preview of what lies ahead in each book, but they also symbolize a greater theme found in the book.

In Book Five, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Rowling's title refers to a group that fought against Voldemort during the height of his power and has reunited since the resurrection of Voldemort at the end of Book Four, *Goblet of Fire* (643). Because the Order is composed of adults with more magical experience, Harry is not allowed to join, but the organization serves as part of Harry's inspiration for creating Dumbledore's Army at Hogwarts (392). The group is founded so Harry can teach his friends many of the spells he has learned through his experience with dark wizards, and the group is united due to its members' understanding that the ability to fight will become necessary with Voldemort's return (339). Again the title represents both a specific entity and a larger thematic element in the story. While this phrase obviously refers to the Order as an organization, it also represents the larger desire to fight against Voldemort and his supporters. The call to fight Voldemort is spread across the Wizarding community and takes root in organizations like the Order of the Phoenix and Dumbledore's Army because the threat Voldemort poses is so dangerous. In this case, the multiple meanings of the title are slightly more connected due to the nature and mission of the Order, but Rowling uses the Order as the face of the resistance against Voldemort. Though this novel finds Harry struggling with the frustration of Occlumency lessons and being the public target of ridicule due to his claims that the Dark Lord has returned, Harry finds solace and strength in the knowledge that he is not alone in his fight.

The final book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, finds Harry

facing his most onerous challenges as he attempts to locate and destroy Voldemort's Horcruxes before fighting the Dark Lord himself. In the first half of the novel, we discover that the book's title refers to three fabled items – the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Cloak of Invisibility – which are said to make their owner the master of death (410). Owning these items is a tempting prospect for Harry, especially when he realizes Voldemort is in search of the Elder Wand (500). However, when Harry must decide between a search for Hallows or Horcruxes, he chooses to continue his mission to destroy the Horcruxes rather than try to find items that could help him escape death (500). This difficult decision represents Harry's growth and maturity over the series and it distinguishes him from his enemy. Voldemort, frightened at the prospect that Harry is gaining the upper hand, seeks an easy way to find what is said to be the most powerful wand in the Wizarding world, while Harry perseveres in his attempt to stop Voldemort (500). Rowling's title again works literally and metaphorically to represent multiple elements of her story – first, the literal Deathly Hallows which make their owner incapable of defeat, and second, the temptations Harry has learned to resist as he has matured and works to become the greater wizard in his fight against Voldemort. Rowling's titles, therefore, inspire her readers to think more critically about her books and in turn understand the complexity of her story.

Again, this technique is echoed in many of the novels we recognize as classic literature. One of the most obvious examples of controlling metaphors in literature is seen in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, a title which primarily refers to the letter Hester Prynne wears on her clothing to shame her for her adultery, but also eventually comes to represent Hester's entire identity. The letter "A" is not just a part of her clothing;

it serves as a constant reminder of her illicit relationship with Dimmesdale and eventually comes to stand for the word "able" or "angel" rather than "adulterer" ("Use of Symbolism").

Virginia Woolf also uses this literary device in *A Room of One's Own*, since her title refers literally to the book's concept that a woman needs a space for herself in her home just the same as a man does, but it also metaphorically represents the larger inequality between men and women ("Themes, Motifs, & Symbols"). The sanctity of one's own space also allows for privacy and independence that was not inherently given to women in the early twentieth century when the novel was first published, so Woolf's title serves as a symbol for a larger issue in society as well.

A controlling metaphor is also present in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* since the title is repeated in dialogue throughout the novel but also represents the book's theme regarding the loss of innocence. The phrase is said by Atticus Finch to his daughter, Scout, explaining that "it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" because they do no harm; they are purely songbirds (90). Metaphorically, this phrase also applies directly to characters like Tom Robinson or Boo Radley, who are either killed or hurt in instances when evil triumphs over innocence. Lee's title not only refers directly to several passages in her text, but it also symbolizes the fates of her characters who suffer at the hand of evil. In this way, the book's title functions both literally and metaphorically, prompting readers to think critically about the title's significance as it relates to the book's overall theme.

Though the stories of Rowling, Hawthorne, Woolf, and Lee may be quite different, the authors' uses of controlling metaphors shows the importance of employing

certain literary techniques in all genres. Perhaps the use of controlling metaphor that is most similar to Rowling's books is seen in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, a series the Potter books are often compared to. The ring referenced in the title is present throughout the series and is primarily connected to its maker's evil power. The ring inspires dangerous behavior and a lust for power in even the most innocent characters, and the character Gollum serves as the epitome of this thirst for power. Tolkien's ring could easily be compared to Rowling's Deathly Hallows; both are items that inspire greed and desire in characters who seem unlikely targets. While Tolkien's books may have been a source of inspiration for Rowling in more ways than one, it is clear that Rowling has looked to some of the most respected writers in choosing titles for her books that force readers to think beyond their literal meanings to the abstract themes they represent.

Irony

Irony is another literary device that pervades Rowling's narrative, providing readers with situations that challenge their expectations over the course of the series. At times, Rowling's use of irony serves as a means to comment on the hypocrisies found both in reality and the Wizarding community and at others to create an unexpected twist in the narrative.

One of the more notable instances of irony occurs in Book Three, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, when Harry learns that the man whom Harry had been told betrayed his parents to Voldemort and escaped from Azkaban to kill him, Sirius Black, is in fact one of the Potters' most loyal friends and, as Harry's godfather, the last remaining connection Harry has to his parents in the Wizarding world. After realizing Sirius's loyalty to his parents

and devising a plan to prove his innocence, Harry agrees to live with Sirius, believing he could finally find a home where he truly belongs. Unfortunately, the situation does not work out in their favor, forcing Sirius to remain in hiding. Just when Harry feels he has found a man who could serve as a replacement for his dead parents, his opportunity for happiness is crushed. The irony of the situation is that when Harry, a boy who has no living relatives affiliated with the Wizarding world, finally finds hope in the promise of living with his godfather, forces outside of his control keep them apart. Harry is destined to live life as an orphan and is once again left to fend for himself.

Rowling continues to use irony to add to the complexity of the series in a way that also works as social commentary. In Book Five, *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry is persecuted by a large faction of the Wizarding community who refuse to believe his claims that Voldemort has returned to power. The *Daily Prophet*, the newspaper of the magical world, continually attempts to falsify Harry's claims, so Harry seeks refuge with *The Quibbler*, the Wizarding equivalent of a tabloid notorious for publishing articles with information that seems absurd, even for the Wizarding world. However, this is the only publication willing to share Harry's point of view, which also happens to be the correct one. While the *Daily Prophet* "[has] run plenty of horrible stories about Harry" (565), *The Quibbler* has "given [Harry] the opportunity to tell the truth" (567) by publishing a tell-all interview in which Harry finally gets his say (579). In this way, Rowling has again created an ironic situation: a newspaper known for its outlandish stories is the only one that publishes the truth about Voldemort's return. This moment not only makes the story more complicated, but also more realistic, creating a world with ambiguous morals more closely mirroring the present-day media.

But perhaps the greatest sense of irony in the series comes from the realization at the end of Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*, that Snape has, unbeknownst to Harry, been protecting him all along. When Harry ventures into Snape's memories moments after the professor's death, Harry is shocked to realize that the man whom he had always considered an enemy of sorts was one of the most loyal and giving people he has ever known, even willing to sacrifice his own life in order to protect Harry (658). Snape, the man whom Harry detested from his first moments at Hogwarts, spent the last years of his life working to protect Harry from Voldemort all because of his love for Harry's mother, despite his disdain for both Harry and Harry's father. The irony of this situation is only appreciated in the *Deathly Hallows* chapter called "The Prince's Tale" when Harry enters Snape's memories and understands his lifelong love for Harry's mother. Snape's motive is quite unexpected, and the revelation that he spent his life trying to keep Harry from harm is shocking to readers who have come to know the cold and sinister professor through Harry's eyes.

Rowling's use of irony echoes other great literary works that employ irony as a narrative device. One of the most well-known examples of irony in literature comes from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in which the titular character abandons his home in Corinth upon hearing an oracle predict that he is going to murder his father and marry his mother. However, Oedipus does not realize that, as a baby, his true father, the king of Thebes, sent him to die, but an adoptive family raised him in Corinth. By fleeing to Thebes, Oedipus is actually able to carry out the oracle's prediction.

Another example of dramatic irony comes from the conclusion of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* when Romeo finds what he believes to be a dead Juliet, assuming that

she has poisoned herself, so Romeo drinks the fatal poison he has procured from the apothecary. However, Juliet has just taken a sleeping potion to appear dead so that Romeo can later rescue her from her tomb, but this information never reaches Romeo, and he dies moments before Juliet wakes from her sleep. Like *Oedipus Rex*, readers of *Romeo and Juliet* recognize the characters' mistakes before they see the problems themselves, leading to tragic endings in both cases. Though Rowling does not use dramatic irony in her writing, the decision to employ situational irony makes her story more profound and her characters more fallible. The irony of such situations as Sirius's mistaken identity as the man who betrayed the Potters shows readers that Rowling's magical world is far from perfect, and it therefore makes the overall story more complex.

Satire

Satire is literary device found in Rowling's series as well; Rowling employs this technique as a critique. One example of Rowling's use of satire is found in her depiction of academia, an institution that is presented throughout the series in various ways. We first learn of the competition between Hogwarts' houses for the Hogwarts Cup in Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*, a running contest that sets the tone for the generally competitive nature of academics at Hogwarts (114). This combative attitude is mirrored among various member of the Hogwarts faculty, presenting readers with a satirized version of university politics, critiquing how cutthroat academics can be with each other in order to get ahead. This is seen most clearly in Snape's repeated desire to be the school's Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, a position that is vacated yearly. Snape always appears to possess a particular disdain for all who have occupied this position at Hogwarts, often

undermining them to make himself appear a more worthy candidate for the position. This is seen both in Snape's antagonistic treatment of Professor Quirrell in Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone* (226), and his disdain for Professor Lupin in Book Three, *Prisoner of Azkaban* (166). In this way, Rowling is drawing attention to the ugly nature of academics and how people get ahead in a university setting.

The satirization of academics continues in Book Three, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, when readers are first introduced to Sybill Trelawney, the professor of Divination at Hogwarts. Trelawney is a caricature of an academic, a woman known for her great eccentricities and questionable ability, and one who is looked down upon by other faculty members. Professor McGonagall clearly dislikes Trelawney, a fact that also contributes to the combativeness between Hogwarts's professors. The competition between these academics continues in Book Five, *Order of the Phoenix*, with the introduction of Dolores Umbridge, a woman who is sent in by the Ministry of Magic to fulfill the Defense Against the Dark Arts position (211) and eventually become the school's High Inquisitor (306). Umbridge's introduction comes at a shaky time in the Wizarding world when the Ministry feels threatened by Harry's claims of Voldemort's return, so Umbridge is sent to Hogwarts as a way for the Ministry to control the school (212). Umbridge's placement at Hogwarts only serves to heighten the antagonism between the school's faculty members, essentially creating two teams of faculty who either support or oppose the imposition of the Ministry at Hogwarts. These are all examples of the exaggerated sense of reality that Rowling uses to make her story more satirical. Rowling takes the commonly recognized stereotype of competitive academics and exaggerates it, making her characters so competitive that it is sometimes laughable. For example, in Book Two,

Chamber of Secrets, Snape embarrasses Professor Lockhart, a man known for his inflated ego and boastful exaggerations, during a dueling demonstration, amusing students and readers alike (190). This technique not only makes her writing more entertaining, it also adds to the overall complexity of the series.

Rowling's use of satire is not just limited to the world of academia; she also uses this literary device to critique the media. In Book Four, *Goblet of Fire*, Harry's unplanned participation in the Triwizard Tournament pushes him even further into the public eye than usual, largely because of the media coverage of the event. When Harry is forced into an interview with Rita Skeeter, a journalist for the *Daily Prophet*, he quickly sees that Skeeter is intent on sensationalizing his story to get more readers (303-7). Skeeter is the embodiment of all that is wrong with tabloid journalism, using her Quick Quotes quill when conducting interviews to capture what she deems fit for publication, usually tending toward exaggerations and half-truths (304). This satirization of sensational journalists again signifies Rowling's desire to point out how corrupt it is for journalists to create their own stories in order to get more readers, implicitly calling for higher ethical standards in journalism. Rowling takes the stereotype of tabloid journalism to the extreme in Rita Skeeter, making her not only unlikeable but also humorous because readers recognize that she is an exaggerated version of the real-life media.

Similarly, Voltaire's *Candide* satirizes the concept of optimism by placing two optimistic characters in continually horrifying situations. Though Voltaire does not employ the same humorous approach as Rowling, his use of satire still allows him to comment on social conventions through fiction. Joseph Heller uses satire to both humorous and serious effect in his novel *Catch-22*, specifically in his portrayal of the

military and war as contradictory institutions. Another example is found in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a novel that satirizes cultural attitudes, particularly racism. Through their use of satire, these authors are able to comment on various social conventions in a way that makes their writing more significant and realistic.

Hyperbole

In literature, hyperbole functions similarly to satire by exaggerating to create emphasis on any given situation. One could argue that a significant percentage of Rowling's writing is hyperbolic as there are many instances in her series when characters or events seem larger than life. For Rowling, hyperbole is apparent from the first pages of Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*, when we see the horrid treatment Harry receives from the Dursleys, his relatives and guardians. Harry is the clear black sheep of the family, forced to live in the cupboard under the stairs (19) while his cousin Dudley lives luxuriously, receiving every toy and gadget he could ever want (21). Harry is also forced to wear Dudley's hand-me-down clothes, despite the fact that Dudley is much larger than him, and until Harry receives his letter from Hogwarts inviting him to the school, the Dursleys keep Harry's connection to the magical realm a secret so he is unaware of his true identity (49). In reality, we would consider these completely unacceptable and highly grievous offenses against a child, but by exaggerating the Dursleys' mistreatment of Harry, Rowling has created a situation that only increases the wonder Harry feels at entering the Wizarding world, making readers feel more empathy for Harry. When spending time with the Dursleys, Harry is neglected or bullied, but he is showered with love and appreciation in the magical community. In that way, the Dursleys' treatment of Harry functions as the

antithesis of the way Harry will be treated for the majority of the series, telling Harry and his readers that the Wizarding world is where he really belongs.

Another example of this occurs in one of Rowling's most hyperbolic characters: Rubeus Hagrid, whose mother was a giantess (*Order of the Phoenix* 691). Hagrid is Harry's introduction to the magical world in Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*, and his presence certainly makes an impact due to his immense size (46). In this novel, Hagrid's size is used to create a stark contrast between the Muggle world Harry grew up in and the new magical world he is joining. Aside from this, Rowling uses Hagrid's larger-than-average size to draw attention to him as a character, emphasizing his role between wizards and other magical populations like Hagrid's giant ancestors. Hagrid occupies a liminal space within the Hogwarts community – he literally lives on the very edge of the Hogwarts grounds – and his social placement is only further emphasized by his stature. Even though Hagrid does not officially belong to the Wizarding community, he is, in fact, one of its most loyal devotees, performing any task Dumbledore asks of him because of his faith in the Headmaster. This is seen in such moments as his retrieval of the Sorcerer's Stone from the magical bank, Gringotts (*Sorcerer's Stone* 73), or his mission to attempt to persuade the giants into allying with Dumbledore and Harry rather than Voldemort (*Order of the Phoenix* 423). In this way, Hagrid's size draws readers' attention to him, emphasizing his strong character and noble personality. Rowling uses Hagrid's hyperbolic stature to draw attention to his many merits, functioning to make him much more than just a two-dimensional character.

In a more general way, there are many instances in the overarching story of the series that seem hyperbolic, especially when concerning Harry's fate. After learning in

Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*, that Harry is famous in the Wizarding world for being the only person to survive a death curse at Voldemort's hand, readers realize that Harry's is not a normal existence, and this theme is echoed time and again throughout the series. After reading the first book, readers can easily predict that Harry will get himself into a dangerous and difficult situation in each installment of the series, even though that would never happen to someone again and again in real life. We see this starting with Harry trying to protect the Sorcerer's Stone from Voldemort in Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone* (270) and eventually taking on the task of defeating Voldemort in Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows* (737). Harry's tendency to be at the center of all danger and drama is so exaggerated that, in Book Four, *Goblet of Fire*, when an unprecedented fourth champion's name erupts from the Goblet of Fire, we of course expect that name to be Harry's, even if he technically should not be allowed to enter the competition (271). The events in Harry's life almost always exhibit a sense of grandeur, working to entertain readers. As the series' protagonist, readers expect Harry to be at the center of the books' action, again making the series more comparable to literary tradition.

Again, Rowling is not alone in her use of hyperbole. In John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, the titular character is almost always an exaggeration, from his size to the words he speaks. Owen is noticeably small in stature, but every line of dialogue he speaks is written in all capital letters, making readers see him as a small person with a massive presence. Like characters in the Potter series, Owen seems larger than life, a hyperbolic version of a real person. These exaggerations emphasize how unique characters like Harry and Owen really are.

The events in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* also take on a hyperbolic nature. Like Harry's knack for getting himself into dangerous situations, the members of the Bundren family seem to run into every obstacle possible on their journey to bury the family's matriarch, including floods, fires, and personal injuries. In the case of the Bundrens, these events contribute to the novel's darkly humorous tone in a way that is similar to how Rowling uses hyperbole in her writing. These events are at times unbelievable, inspiring readers to either empathize with the characters or laugh at their misfortunes. In this way, these authors use hyperbole to entertain, but also to add significance to the events that occur.

Personification

Personification, another literary device pervading the pages of the Potter series, can also function as a form of magical realism. There are many examples of objects coming to life in ways that seem completely ordinary to the average witch or wizard, such as the many magical devices in the Weasley home (*Chamber of Secrets* 34). However, there are also personified objects that are shocking to those in the Wizarding world, like the Whomping Willow. In Book Two, *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry and Ron find themselves entangled in the branches of the Whomping Willow on the grounds of Hogwarts (74). As its name might imply, the Whomping Willow is a rather combative tree, given its human ability to hit anyone or anything that comes into its path. Harry and Ron are unaware of the Willow's human abilities until they find themselves at its mercy (74). Readers learn of these eccentricities at the same time as Rowling's characters, so personification functions to show that some ordinary objects are not always as simple as

they appear, especially in the Wizarding world.

Rowling also includes magical animals throughout the series: Harry's pet owl, Hedwig, and Hermione's cat, Crookshanks, are two animals we come to know as functional characters in and of themselves because they both possess human traits, like distinct personalities and, in Crookshanks's case, a human-like knowledge that aids Harry and his cohorts. In Book Three, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Crookshanks is the only character who knows how to freeze the Whomping Willow when Harry, Ron, and Hermione need to access the secret passageway at the tree's base, an insight that the humans in the series can neither understand nor explain (336). However, Rowling does not stop at just giving animals human abilities; in fact, she uses a more complicated form of personification in which the animals in her series sometimes embody human characteristics because they are actually humans disguised as animals. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, the existence of Animagi – wizards able to morph into animals – is revealed, an insight that is essential to the plot of this novel (108). Sirius Black's ability to morph into a dog and Peter Pettigrew's ability to morph into a rat are both key plot points in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, but they also show Rowling's desire to play with convention. Again, personification seems entangled with the use of magical realism since these fantastical elements of the story are ordinary within the Wizarding world. In this way, Rowling's use of personification becomes a somewhat meta-personification since she expands upon the most conventional uses of this literary device.

Like Rowling's Animagi, George Orwell's cast of characters in *Animal Farm* provide a notable example of literary personification. Orwell's novel features farm animals with human intelligence and abilities, much like Rowling's human-like animals.

Orwell's animals are not just able to talk and think like humans, though; they actually allude to real historical figures like Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin to comment on twentieth-century European history.

Emily Dickinson is another writer known for the use of personification in her poetry. "Because I Could Not Stop For Death," one of Dickinson's most widely recognized poems, personifies death as a living being, something Rowling also does in Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*, with "The Tale of the Three Brothers" (407-9). In Rowling's case, this story is told as a cautionary children's tale that features Death as a human-like character, much like the personified Death in Dickinson's poem. In many ways, these uses of personification allow writers to embed a sense of danger in fiction by making death less of an abstract idea and more of an immediate threat.

Social Critique

Like the many literary devices Rowling uses in her series, social critique functions as a technique that allows Rowling to use fiction to comment on issues in society. One of the most obvious issues of this in the Potter books is found in Book Two, *Chamber of Secrets*, when Harry is first exposed to the elitism that occurs in the magical community based on the purity of a wizard's blood (116). In the Wizarding world, some wizards who consider themselves pure-bloods – meaning their family ancestries are composed entirely of wizards and witches – believe themselves superior to those who may have Muggles in their ancestry (116). When Draco Malfoy calls Hermione a "Mudblood," the derogatory term for Muggle-born wizards, readers get a glimpse at the classism that occurs in the magical community (112). It is not hard for one to think of the

many discriminatory epithets that exist in the real world and parallel the use of “Mudblood” in Rowling’s series. Situations like these make Rowling's narrative more complex and political, showing the complicated sense of morality in the Wizarding world.

Another instance of social commentary occurs in Book Five, *Order of the Phoenix*, when the Ministry of Magic seems bent on painting Harry as a liar after he claims that Voldemort has returned (138). Until this point in the series, Harry has been revered in the magical community, but when he witnesses Voldemort's resurrection and tries to warn the public, the Ministry tries to quiet him rather than facing the grave reality of the situation. At various points in the novel, the Ministry forces the *Daily Prophet* to publish stories delegitimizing Harry's claims (217) and places Dolores Umbridge in a position of power at Hogwarts to both control the school and keep Harry from expressing his position on the subject (211). Harry becomes the scapegoat of the Ministry, proving that the government of the Wizarding world is not as moral and just as one might hope. Again, this notion of a somewhat corrupt government functions as a social critique by pitting Harry against the Ministry when readers know that Harry is telling the truth. The Ministry functions similarly to any real-world government, highlighting the power struggle that can sometimes exist between individual citizens and the government at large.

Harper Lee also uses social critique in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel focused on racial tensions in the American South. Lee uses the trial of African American Tom Robinson, accused of raping a white woman, to comment on racism in the region. Robinson’s situation calls to mind the real-life story of Emmett Till, a young African

American who was murdered after allegedly flirting with a white woman in 1950s Mississippi (“Emmett Till”). Till’s murderers were acquitted of all charges, and Lee mirrors this racial injustice in her novel when Robinson is found guilty of a crime he did not commit. Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, J.R.R. Tolkien uses the power that the Ring holds over its possessors to comment on the presence of greed in society. The Ring affects its wearers, causing them to feel lustful for power and willing to do anything to attain a higher level of control. This ability of the Ring serves as Tolkien’s commentary on greed in modern society, exemplifying the ways in which people often abandon their morals for the chance to become more powerful. In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell’s characters, even though they are animals, develop a hierarchy within their community as Snowball and Napoleon compete for control. Though these stories, like the Potter series, take place in fantastical worlds, the inclusion of such themes as the struggle and thirst for power in a competitive society are both realistic and provocative, designed to make readers challenge the status quo.

Symbolism

Symbolism, like many other literary devices, is found in all types of literature because it allows authors to use an image to represent another, unspoken entity. In the Potter series, symbolism often takes form in determinedly Christian imagery, a truth that counters the many claims that the Potter series is pagan. This symbolism can be identified throughout the series: the contrast between the Gryffindor lion, which Harry Potter scholar John Granger calls a “symbolic point of correspondence between Christ and the world of Harry Potter,” and the Slytherin serpent, which calls to mind the serpent in the

Garden of Eden (107). The most significant examples of Christian symbolism, though, occur in Book Seven, *Deathly Hallows*, when Harry faces his most difficult challenges. In the chapter “The Silver Doe,” Harry descends into icy cold waters to retrieve the sword of Gryffindor, and Ron rescues him, mirroring the image of a Christian baptism (370). Granger discusses this scene at length in his book *How Harry Cast His Spell*, explaining that “Ron and Harry are fully immersed and ritually cleansed by their sacrificial time in the pool” (Granger 221). Since this scene marks Ron’s return after previously abandoning Harry and Hermione, “Ron’s experience is the most important because his symbolic baptism and liberation from the demons darkening his heart afterward is an enlightenment or illumination” (Granger 221-2). This scene exemplifies Rowling’s use of Christian symbolism because, while it may seem to be just another plot point, it actually represents an image closely linked to Christianity. Even though Rowling’s series clearly contains these Christian images, it is read by people of all types of backgrounds from across the world. Rather than writing an obvious Christian allegory, Rowling creates something that is much more versatile, and, as Granger writes, “the truth within the Christian tradition is spiritually satisfying to everyone. *It answers universal questions about what it means to be human.* It works” (229). In this way, the Christian elements of this story work on a more universal level and provide answers to questions asked by humans worldwide, regardless of their religious backgrounds.

Perhaps the most obvious use of Christian symbolism in the Potter series occurs in the final chapters of *Deathly Hallows*, when Harry enters the Forbidden Forest to meet Voldemort and sacrifice himself (698). This scene is, of course, reminiscent of Jesus sacrificing his life for his followers, the most important moment in the Christian Bible.

Though not a perfect Christ-figure, Harry takes on the same immense responsibility: sacrificing himself so that those around him will have a chance at better lives. This reference to Christian tradition continues when, after Harry has been hit by Voldemort's Killing Curse, he finds himself in a purgatory-like state where he meets Dumbledore for the first time since Dumbledore's death the previous year (707). The discussion between Harry and Dumbledore provides Harry with the answers he needs and motivates Harry to return to his body and end the fight against Voldemort (724). Again, Harry's decision to return to Hogwarts calls to mind Christ's resurrection, reinforcing the similarities between Harry and Jesus and causing readers to think about the story in a bigger context because it speaks to people of all faiths and backgrounds. As Granger says, the Potter series is so popular because people of all backgrounds can connect to the story (*How Harry* 228). Specifically, Granger writes, "This is a critical point in understanding the popularity of Harry Potter. It is undeniably Christian, that is, loaded with specific Christian symbolism and meaning from the author's literary traditions, yet sufficiently universal to be spiritually satisfying to anyone" (228). In this statement, Granger is able to explain both why the Potter series can be considered literary and why it has been so popular.

In *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, author C.S. Lewis uses symbolism in a very similar way to Rowling, creating biblical allusions through such characters as the lion, Aslan, who sacrifices himself to save Edmund and is later resurrected. Aslan's sacrifice, like Harry's, is symbolic of Christ's sacrifice for all humankind. In these situations, the authors' use of symbolism functions to give their stories deeper meaning because their characters work as original creations and representations of figures from the Christian faith. Rowling uses this Judeo-Christian symbolism to better reach her readers

who are familiar with an archetypal story in which a Christ figure must die in order to save the human population.

In a more general way, symbolism is used in many other literary works like Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Hawthorne uses such symbols as the titular letter "A" to represent larger themes – like Hester's adultery – pertinent to the novel as a whole. Fitzgerald uses the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg as a symbol of God watching down over the Valley of Ashes, the location of the novel's most morally ambiguous scenes. These symbols add to the significance of their stories by creating representations of other beings, motivating readers to think about the overarching themes of these novels.

Rowling, of course, uses symbolism in a similar way in her writing, by creating moments in her series that are symbolic of other well-known stories and situations. Literary devices are essential to any high quality pieces of writing, as they make stories both more entertaining and more complex. Rowling's use of such techniques proves that her series is not just commercially successful, but also successful by literary standards.

CONCLUSION

The definition of what it means for a piece of writing to be deemed "literary" is certainly up for personal interpretation, especially since the only restriction as defined by the *Oxford Online Dictionary* is that the written work be "of superior or lasting artistic merit" ("Literature"). Despite our most common conceptions of what is deemed literary, this definition allows for a much more inclusive canon of works from all time periods and genres. By this definition, then, it should be easy to see why the Harry Potter series is worthy of a literary denotation. Since Book One, *Sorcerer's Stone*, was first published in the United States in 1998, the series has remained a bestseller from year to year, and each installment in the series ranked in the top sixty highest selling books of the decade from 2000 to 2009, with *Deathly Hallows* coming in at number one, and *Half-Blood Prince* and *Order of the Phoenix* also placing in the top five ("Books of the Decade"). The overall history of the Potter series may be relatively short in comparison with other commonly recognized classics, but, in the sixteen years since the American release of the first novel, the series has made an immense and lasting impression on the landscape of popular culture and young adult literature.

The commercial success of the Potter series certainly cannot be ignored; over 450 million copies of the seven novels and three supplemental books have sold worldwide, making the Potter books the highest-selling English-language series in history ("List of Bestselling Books"). However, the Potter series is not just a commercial hit, it also

represent a unique venture into popular, contemporary literature due to the many literary techniques Rowling uses. The Potter books have been credited with instigating a rise in young readership and fostering an environment in which young adult books continue to be successful, including other commercial successes like Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* ("List of Bestselling Books"). The Potter books are significant not just for their own immense financial success, but also for the impact they have had on young adult literature as a whole. According to a 2006 study by The Kids and Family Reading Report™, 51% of Harry Potter readers aged five to seventeen years old claimed that they did not read for fun before reading the Potter books, and 89% of parents said reading the Potter books made their children enjoy reading more ("New Study"). These statistics are concrete proof that Rowling's series has had a significant impression on American readership and serve as further evidence that these books will have lasting merit.

Apart from her series' immense effect on young adult literature, though, is the undeniable fact that Rowling is not just a writer capable of achieving high sales, but also one who possesses a talent for creating complex and fallible characters who make her books comparable to those of other literary greats. Rowling's use of complicated characters and literary devices not only set her apart from many of her contemporaries, but also places her among a canon of great authors who use these same techniques to make their works more literary. On the surface, Rowling's series may appear to serve a purely entertaining purpose, but Rowling has created a layered narrative that operates on many different levels. The series' recent publication and primarily young audience can distract critics from the deeper meanings that can be found within it, but the variegated

nature of the series is what makes it so important and relevant to academic study. The Harry Potter series is not only enjoyable for audiences of all ages, it exemplifies a variety of complex writing techniques that prove its merit. When examined with a critical eye, readers can easily see this and more fully appreciate what is a truly literary work of contemporary writing.

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