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## Hermione as Woman

# Unstoppable Force

## *Maternal Power and Feminism*

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Although the Harry Potter series and its film adaptations focus on the adventures of its eponymous main character, women both living and dead play a significant role in not only moving the story forward but in driving its salient themes of love and sacrifice for others. As Dumbledore keeps reminding Harry, it is his mother's willingness to die for him that allows him to survive and finally defeat Voldemort. Maternal power, however, is not limited to Lily Potter. The series is propelled by a number of literal and metaphorical mothers, who through the success or failure of their maternal roles determine the fate of the world created by Rowling. The series portrays the strides made by feminism,<sup>1</sup> especially through the contrast and similarities between Molly Weasley and Hermione Granger. Through Hermione's character, Rowling addresses much of the ambivalence many Second Wave feminists have expressed about motherhood's demands and the ways in which maternal roles have been used to keep women from focusing on their own needs.

Second Wave feminism's relationship to women's maternal duties is understandably ambivalent. While women have been historically able to exercise great power through their roles as mothers and matriarchs, their maternal obligations also fettered them to the home sphere, often preventing them from growing intellectually and professionally. Thus, the Second Wave's push for women to find fulfillment in education, the work place and sexual liberation didn't always leave room for motherhood. Most working women wanting to have a family today find that the Second Wave's conflicts have not been resolved.

Women still face the arduous task of balancing motherhood and their professional commitments. In spite of being childless in the literal sense until the epilogue, Hermione, who I will claim is a Third Wave Feminist, performs

maternal functions toward Harry, while excelling in her "professional" life, that of student, rebel witch and Horcrux hunter. This essay will propose that in the books and the film adaptations, Hermione serves as both argument and inspiration for women's ability to succeed in motherhood, their careers and their relationships with friends, family and partners. I will examine how maternal power is embodied by the other characters in the story in order to show that Rowling presents a complex portrayal of the conflicts mothers experience, thus providing a rich and detailed context for readers to understand Hermione's own maternal power.

### *The Right Kind of Sacrifice*

Before we even meet the ten-year-old Harry, we learn of his mistreatment at the Dursleys. Although there are pictures of Dudley all over their living room, "The room held no sign at all that another boy lived in the house, too" (1997, p. 18). His Aunt Petunia is neglectful, and while most of the cruelty Harry suffers growing up is not inflicted by her, she does nothing to stop her husband from abusing her nephew. However, as Dumbledore explains to the Dursleys, Harry "at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy sitting between you" (2005, p. 55). As much as Harry grows up unloved, he is not spoiled and smothered as Dudley is. Petunia, the most detached from feminism of any other female characters in the series, stays home, cooks, cleans obsessively, spies on her neighbors, is terrified of losing her social status, is subservient to her husband and dotes on Dudley to the point of asphyxiation. Her maternal skills are so poor that she manages to turn the boy she hates into a decent human being and the boy she loves into a bullying, selfish coward. It is unclear how much of this is her own doing and how much comes from her unquestioning faith in her husband's judgment. Either way, through Petunia, Rowling delivers a clear warning that mothers untouched by feminism are not only hurtful to themselves — she is perpetually anxious — but to their families.

Perhaps harder to believe than the existence of giants and Polyjuice Potion is the fact that petty and unkind Petunia could have grown up in the same family as Lily. The first thing Harry hears from the world of magic comes from Hagrid, who tells him, "Yeh look a lot like yer dad, but yeh've got yer mom's eyes" (1997, p. 47). He will continue to hear this throughout the series. From Hagrid, Harry also learns that his parents were Head boy and Head girl at Hogwarts and very talented. They were also good providers, leaving Harry with a vault full of gold that keeps him from having to resort to the scholarship fund fellow orphan Tom Riddle uses to cover his Hogwarts expenses.

We don't know much about Lily's profession, but we don't know about James's either, so we can assume that with her talent she probably worked, or would have worked if she hadn't come of age during the most dangerous time in wizarding history. Besides being members of the Order of the Phoenix and eventually going into hiding, we don't know how Harry's parents spent their time other than doting on their son, of which we learn through Lily's letter to Sirius. Lily is "a very pretty woman" (1997, p. 208) but no one refers to her as a great beauty, as they do with Draco's mother, Narcissa, or with Fleur. Unlike the latter two, whose main attraction lies not in the way they relate to others but in their looks, Lily has the most popular boy at school in love with her when there are, no doubt, more physically striking girls he could focus on. Hermione, who I will show is like Lily in many ways, experiences something similar when Viktor Krum starts frequenting the library for a chance to be near her. While we know Hermione from the beginning and can see why someone like Krum might find her attractive, it is not till the end of *DH* that we finally come to understand everything Lily had to offer the two brilliant wizards who loved her till the day they died.

The first time we actually meet Lily is through a memory Snape tries to keep from Harry during their Occlumency lessons. The memory is just as painful for Harry as it is for Snape but for different reasons. Up until this moment, Harry has missed his mother's love and thanked her for her sacrifice, but his fascination has been with his father, the Quidditch star and brilliant rule-breaking trickster whose best friend, Sirius Black, is one of Harry's favorite people. His connection to his father is so strong that his Patronus, unknown to him, is a stag like James's. Harry craves being told that he is like James, whom he has built up to be flawless in his mind.

Snape's memory reveals a very different father. We see a fifteen-year-old James, concerned about his appearance and with attracting attention, who attacks someone simply because Sirius is bored. His *Scourgify* jinx makes Snape gag and choke. Everyone laughs until Lily defends him by saying, "You think you're funny.... But you're just an arrogant, bullying toerag, Potter. Leave him *alone*" (2003, p. 647). As James's torture continues and Lily's attempts to rescue Snape intensify, Harry has two dreadful realizations. The first is that his father was a bully, something that Harry, having been bullied by Dudley, cannot quickly forgive. The second is that "his mother had been decent, yet the memory of the look on her face as she had shouted at James disturbed him quite as much as anything else" (2003, p. 653). For the first time in the series, when it comes to looking at his mother and father, Harry identifies with Lily, not James, and worries that his good mother ended up in a loveless marriage to his unkind father. It is surprising, perhaps, that it has taken him so long to see himself as being more similar to Lily than James. As

Ximena Gallardo-C. and Jason Smith explain, "Appearing with a traditionally feminine narrative structure, Harry, in essence, is a boy caught in a girl's story.... Harry may be sexed male, but he is passing through a world where many females have walked before him and triumphed" (2003, p. 196). They argue that Harry's experience of childhood abuse and being constantly rewarded for his selflessness and kindness is closer to a female than a male hero journey. While I think their notions of gender may be too rigid, Gallardo-C and Smith help us see that Harry is much closer to Lily than James in how he relates to others.

Perhaps due to the mistreatment he experienced growing up with the Dursleys, Harry is aware of others' pain and never hurts someone — not even his enemy Draco — unprovoked. Unlike, his father, who according to Sirius bullied Snape in part to get Lily's attention, Harry is shy around Cho and Ginny, never flaunting his masculinity. Like Lily, who as a Muggleborn has seen her share of discrimination — even from Snape — Harry cannot bear to hurt others for the fun of it because he knows exactly what it feels like to be on the receiving end of that fun. However, as I will show below, it is Hermione, another maligned Muggleborn, whose compassion allows her to detect and ease the pain of other people and creatures that go unnoticed by Harry. From the little we see of Lily, we get a sense that like Hermione, she had a keen sense of compassion for others, which is why Hermione's guidance of Harry in that respect feels like a completion of what Lily would have wanted for her son. The film adaptation's choice to blur and shorten the memory of James' bullying of Snape, and to remove Lily from it, makes sense in terms of keeping things moving at a cinematic pace, but it also deprives audiences of the chance to see Harry identify with Lily, not James, a key statement made in the books.

It is Snape who, before dying, provides us with a narrative about Lily's childhood and teenage years. Through his memories we learn that Petunia's treatment of Harry was not instigated by Lily, who was loving and protective of her Muggle sister. We also see her nonjudgmental personality as she befriends the greasy-haired, poorly dressed and abused boy whom Petunia finds disgusting. In school, where she is clearly popular, Lily sticks by the very unpopular Snape, worrying about his Dark Magic proclivities and trying to stymie his hatred for Muggleborns. The whole story rests on Lily's kindness toward Snape, but we don't realize this until the final section of *DH*. Readers may wonder why if both James and Lily died trying to save Harry, it is only Lily's sacrifice that protects him. The answer lies in the fact that Snape, still in love with Lily and horrified that it was his own reporting on Trelawney's prediction that leads Voldemort to kill Harry, begs Voldemort to spare her. Voldemort in a rare display of humanity agrees to keep her alive for Snape's sake. Thus, unlike James, who is killed on the spot, Voldemort gives Lily a

choice to save herself, and it is when she refuses that the protective spell of her love is cast. One could argue that most mothers would have died to protect their son, but it is Lily's loyalty and caring for an unwanted and tortured person like Snape that causes her sacrifice to work toward defeating the most dangerous wizard of all time.

While Lily's sacrifice keeps Harry alive, it is not enough to defeat Voldemort. For that, Harry must learn to follow in his mother's footsteps and sacrifice himself for the ones he loves. By allowing Voldemort to kill him, Harry awakens Lily's protection living in Voldemort's own blood since he took Harry's blood to rebuild his body. Thanks to Lily's choice, however, it is only the fragment of Voldemort's soul living inside Harry that dies when Harry lets himself be killed, leaving Voldemort unable to hurt Harry or any of the people he sacrificed himself to protect. Hermione's role in his ability to make the right choice is almost as important as Lily's. As Dumbledore's spirit explains to Harry, it was key that he choose to destroy the Horcruxes instead of trying to make himself immortal through the Hallows, because without sacrificing himself he would have been unable to defeat Voldemort. To keep him from the Hallows temptation, Dumbledore says, "I counted on Miss Granger to slow you up, Harry. I was afraid that your hot head might dominate your good heart" (2007, p. 720). Hermione, as Dumbledore hoped, keeps Harry focused on destroying the Horcruxes, completing the work Lily began toward turning Harry into the sort of person who, like herself, is willing to die to protect those he loves instead of seeking immortality, as Voldemort does.

Lily and Hermione's work would have been for nothing if Harry had not received help from an unlikely ally. When Narcissa is asked to check whether Harry is dead after Voldemort attacks him, she immediately realizes he's breathing. Instead of giving him away, however, she asks whether Draco is still alive. When she learns he is, she claims that Harry has been killed. As Harry explains, "Narcissa knew that the only way she would be permitted to enter Hogwarts, and find her son, was as part of the conquering army. She no longer cared whether Voldemort won" (2007, p. 726). Narcissa's action is crucial because anyone else could have killed Harry at this point, since Lily's and his own sacrifice protect him only from Voldemort. Narcissa, as we learn in the books, is as hateful and prejudiced as her son, calling Hermione "scum" (2005, p. 114) and, no doubt, supporting her husband's efforts to bring Voldemort back. However, her love for Draco is much stronger than her politics and racism, leading her to not only lie to Voldemort but to ask Snape, against Voldemort's orders, to make the unbreakable vow to help Draco kill Dumbledore. Even in this Death Eater, maternal love is more powerful than any other allegiance.

As Dumbledore would no doubt remind us, it is Voldemort's misunderstanding of maternal love that leads him to trust Narcissa with the task of checking Harry. His ignorance stems from having never met Merope, his own mother, who after years of abuse by her father and brother fell in love with Tom Riddle, a handsome Muggle neighbor. Dumbledore conjectures that she used love potions to keep him by her side, but once she was pregnant she mistakenly thought he'd grown to love her, so she stopped using them. Abandoned by Riddle, she refused to use magic and made no effort to stay alive to care for her son. When Harry questions her behavior, Dumbledore tells him, "do not judge her too harshly, Harry. She was greatly weakened by long suffering and she never had your mother's courage" (2005, p. 262.). While Dumbledore is able to forgive her, Voldemort interprets her death as weakness and abandonment. Being his only magical parent, she bequeaths him the gift of magic, and a very powerful magic at that, but she does not accompany that gift with love and caring — not that she had known any herself — thus creating a monster. Like Petunia, Merope in her utter weakness and helpless suffering at the hands of men, is far removed from feminism. However, while Petunia's behavior seems to be a choice — after all, her sister Lily fits many feminist ideals — Merope never had a chance. It is accidental poor mothering, then, that seems to be the source of the worse evil in the series.

Merope's story has been omitted from the films, weakening Rowling's emphasis on maternal abandonment as an insurmountable problem. It is hard to say whether Merope, as well as Lily's defense of Snape, have been left out in order to keep the films going at an entertaining cinematic pace, or if the significance of such moments was simply missed by the male screenwriters and director. Perhaps adding a female screenwriter to the team may have resulted in these sections being included, though of course, we cannot assume that because a writer is female, she will be attuned to issues of gender and maternal power. Still, for a series that was written by a woman and that deals with female and feminist issues throughout, having at least some female screenwriters and directors might have resulted in films that more strongly reflect the gender issues presented in the books.

### *Metaphorical Mothers*

While Dumbledore acts as a father/grandfather for Harry, his fellow Hogwarts professor Minerva McGonagall provides what none of his other mother replacements do: discipline and rigidity. When Harry meets her, we learn that "[s]he had a very stern face and Harry's first thought was that this was not someone to cross" (1997, p. 113). His first impression is indeed right.

Minerva has no problem putting him in detention when she thinks he deserves it, and unlike other teachers like Dumbledore, Lupin and Slughorn, she does not overlook his faults or infractions out of fondness or to protect him. The only exceptions concern Quidditch, of which she's as an avid fan, and she's willing to slightly bend the rules for her Seeker. Minerva's stern treatment of Harry does not come from unkindness or lack of love — she cares so much about him that she spends a whole day spying on the Dursleys before Harry is brought to them as a baby. She treats Harry with discipline because she believes that's the best she can do for him. This particular incarnation of the mother in Rowling's universe believes in letting children learn from their own mistakes and making sure it's clear to them that she will not get them out of the messes they get themselves into. This approach takes perhaps more courage than the others since it makes women who are devoted to children, as Minerva is to Harry and his fellow Gryffindors, less popular with them than more forgiving, affectionate mother figures.

Molly Weasley is as rigid with her children as Minerva is with Harry, although she doesn't discipline Harry in the same way, in spite of thinking of him as a son. She takes care of him from the moment she sees him struggling to get into platform 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> and helps him figure out how to do it. She then protects him when Fred wants to ask him what Voldemort looks like, telling her son, "I forbid you to ask him, Fred. No, don't you dare. As though he needs reminding of that on his first day at school" (1997, p. 97). She seals his welcome into the family by making him Weasley sweaters every Christmas — a privilege neither Hermione nor Bill's fiancée Fleur enjoy — and she gives him her brother Fabian's gold watch for his seventeenth birthday, a gift parents usually provide on that occasion (2007, p. 114). During her argument with Sirius about how much Harry should be told about the Order of the Phoenix, Sirius tells her that Harry is not her son, to which she replies, "He's as good as.... Who else has he got?" (2003, p. 90). Harry has a number of potential mothers, as I have shown and will continue to show, but Molly is the only one to actually claim him as a son. Moreover, being accepted by Molly means being part of her talented and loving family, thus fulfilling Harry's dearest wish: to have a family.

One could perhaps make an argument for Molly being quite removed from feminism. She is, after all, a housewife whose life revolves around her children and husband, and who, although a member of the Order of the Phoenix, seems to mostly cook and clean for them, a glorified maid of sorts. Following the above description, we could picture Molly as what Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards call Martyr Moms, who "are passive-aggressive, making dinner for eight when they're exhausted, and then hating you later for it, essentially ceding their own lives in the thankless service of others

[since our] patriarchal society expects mothers to be totally giving and available, downplaying their own needs, ambitions, and desires" (2000, p. 211). Martyr Moms existed before the Second Wave of feminism, but after the 60s and 70s, when female liberation discourses became more widespread, the problem intensified. Knowing there is a different way of living as a woman but being unable to attain it cannot be easy for overworked mothers who feel their labor is not appreciated. Rowling could have easily turned Molly into a Martyr Mom, but instead she crafted her as someone who finds great empowerment and joy in her maternal role, not only toward her own children and Harry, but toward fellow members of the Order like Tonks and Lupin. Rowling is making an argument for women like Molly, who happily and skillfully perform the role of housewife and mother, to also be viable representations of feminism.

Molly is an accomplished cook and healer and manages to keep a house that, while not obsessively clean like Petunia's, is always pleasantly livable. Although she has seven children — eight if you count Harry — she seems to find time to focus on all of them, often to their annoyance, as her arguments with Bill about his earring and long hair show. She also worries about Harry's appearance, not only laundering his clothes but "attacking his hair with a wet comb" before he attends his hearing at the Ministry (2003, p. 157). Like Bill, Harry finds this gesture slightly irksome, since in *OotP* he is barely managing to keep his adolescent rage under control. However, much like the Weasley children, he knows it comes out of love, and he doesn't outwardly fight it.

While Molly takes care of her children's physical needs, she also exercises all discipline at home. After Ron and the twins steal Arthur's car to rescue Harry from the Dursleys, they are terrified of her wrath upon their return. "All three of Mrs. Weasley's sons were taller than she was, but they cowered as her rage broke over them" (1999, p. 33). Even Mr. Weasley fears her, threatening the twins to tell their mother about how they tested one of their products on Dudley but backpedaling when she questions him about the incident. Gallardo C. and Smith argue that Molly's role as the disciplinarian is problematic because it reinforces "the image of women as the civilizers of men" (2003, p. 193). However, Molly is just as strict with Ginny, so she is in fact the "civilizer" of children. I would argue that her role as a disciplinarian can be seen as one of strength. She is undermining the traditional view of fathers being the ones who children fear and who exercise control over their behavior.

Molly is not perfect, however. As Gallardo C. and Smith note, "both Hermione and Mrs. Weasley fall head over heels for the vain and fraudulent Gilderoy Lockhart" (2003, p. 194). In the twelve-year-old Hermione it's understandable, but in Molly it shows a marked lack of instinct, since it takes Harry one brief meeting to know Lockhart can't be trusted. Molly also believes

Rita Skeeter's lies about Harry and Hermione's broken love affair, showing a lack of sophistication when it comes to navigating the press. Perhaps Molly's most unfair and arguably immature behavior is toward Fleur, who although slightly arrogant and not always pleasant, is very much in love with Bill. Molly goes as far as to not make her a Weasley sweater when everyone else gets one that Christmas. However, we learn that her decision to exclude Fleur comes from fear that Fleur doesn't love Bill enough. After Bill is attacked by Greyback, Fleur shows Molly how wrong she is by saying, "What do I care how he looks? I am good-looking enough for both of us, I theenk! All these scars show is zat my husband is brave!" (2005, p. 623). Having proven her love, Fleur is accepted with open arms by Molly, who proceeds to host their wedding with great zeal.

While some readers may find Molly's foibles problematic, especially since the former two make her seem less intelligent than other characters, I would argue that her positive qualities far outweigh the negative ones. Moreover, from a feminist perspective, showing readers that a mother need not be a perfect human being is a valuable statement. Much of motherhood's power historically came from the assumption that mothers were selfless beings dedicated to their children and husbands' happiness, often ignoring their own needs. While we have been made to believe that such a mother is a morally superior being who deserves admiration, it is also a near impossible and not very enjoyable way to live, and one of the reasons why Second Wave feminists questioned motherhood so strongly. Although Molly represents many of the pre-feminism characteristics of motherhood, she is also imperfect and a little foolish at times, reminding readers that one need not be blameless to succeed as a mother.

Molly's love for her family comes at a steep price. When having to defeat the boggart at Grimmauld place, she cries as she watches it turn into the cadaver of every one of her children, including Harry. While his siblings and father are furious at Percy's betrayal of the family, Molly is wounded by it. As Ron explains, "She came up to London to try and talk to Percy but he slammed the door in her face" (2003, p. 72). She persists even though he sends back his Christmas sweater and pretends to visit them only so Scrimgeour can speak to Harry (2005, p. 341). Knowing that their mother cannot help but forgive such grave offenses solidifies for her children the extent to which her anger and strictness comes from her desire to see them well and happy. Even the twins, who are the recipients of her most enraged lectures, become a source of pride once they show that they'll be able to take care of themselves. Having never had a single luxury throughout the story, she gladly wears their expensive Christmas gifts and shows pride in their business acumen. The fact that the twins manage to appreciate her serves as an argument

that for non-Martyr Moms there is the reward of having one's grown children be thankful for their upbringing.

The twins' celebration of their mother is particularly important because Fred dies at the end of *DH*, so that getting some closure for their past conflicts is important. After mourning her son, Molly, who has stayed behind not only for every mission of the Order but even for the Quidditch World Cup, finally displays her ability to fight during the final battle at Hogwarts. She finds Bellatrix dueling with Ginny, Luna and Hermione, and when she sees Bellatrix barely miss the Killing Curse she sends to Ginny, she screams, "NOT MY DAUGHTER, YOU BITCH!" (2007, p. 737). After Bellatrix mocks, "What will happen to your children when I've killed you? ... When Mummy's gone the same way as Freddie?" Molly kills her (2007, p. 737). Second only to Voldemort in enjoyment of evil, Bellatrix has been the second most dreaded villain in the story. A woman with no maternal inclinations who is able to mock another whose child has just been murdered, Bellatrix is as ignorant of the power of maternal love as her master. By killing her, Molly proves that her absence from the Order's missions was not due to her lack of fighting ability. Being a housewife and a doting mother does not preclude a woman from being fierce when such behavior is needed. Voldemort and Bellatrix, the two deadliest villains in the story, are defeated by mothers fighting to protect their children and, in Harry's case, by those children honoring and continuing the maternal sacrifice.

### *Living in Third Wave Feminism*

While Molly thrives in the home sphere, her younger counterpart Hermione would most likely find such a life dull and repressive. It is not that Hermione has no maternal inclinations. She is as dedicated to mothering others as Molly, but she is also deeply tied to her professional aspirations. Like others born after the 70s in the West, she "never knew a time before 'girls can do anything boys can!'" (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000, p. 16). Third Wave feminists, and I argue that Hermione fits under that label, benefit from the labor of Second Wave feminists, often taking equality with men and the right to aspire to professional and emotionally fulfilling lives for granted. Perhaps because these rights — if certainly not the realities — seem self-evident, the fact that mere decades ago they were unheard of escapes many young women today, including those who identify themselves as feminists.

As Baumgardner and Richards explain, this ignorance of how much we owe to the feminists who came before us comes in part because, as with the First Wave, we have little knowledge of our feminist predecessors' history.

Moreover, for the Third Wave they argue that “while on a personal level feminism is everywhere, like fluoride, on a political level the movement is more like nitrogen: ubiquitous and inert” (2000, p. 13). The main criticism of Third Wave feminists is that while they may live feminist lives, thriving professionally, demanding equal treatment on a personal level and taking charge of their sexuality, feminism as a movement seems dormant when compared to the Second Wave’s more organized and visible struggle. However, as Baumgardner and Richards explain, the goals of feminism have remained constant for centuries: “legal, political, and social equality” for everyone (2000, p. 20). Moreover, in order to attain those goals, Baumgardner and Richards remind us that Third Wave feminists across the world are in fact working in ways that resemble the Second Wave’s marches, feminist schools and attempts to pass legislation. These efforts are more scattered but they still take place.

As an example of Third Wave feminism, Hermione attempts to start a political movement to protect house elves, confronts Harry and Ron’s sexism, is sexually liberated and excels academically, ensuring a bright professional future. However, the Hermione we meet on the first Hogwarts Express has a long way to go to become the strong and compassionate young woman we come to identify with her character. Harry’s first impression of Hermione is that she has “a bossy sort of voice” (1997, p. 105). She confirms his idea by telling him and Ron to change into their robes. She is also arrogant. Not only mocking Ron’s spell to turn Scabbers yellow but chastising Harry for not having read the books that talk about him. She continually lectures them over breaking the rules, “Don’t you *care* about Gryffindor, do you *only* care about yourselves, I don’t want Slytherin to win the house cup, and you’ll lose all the points I got from Professor McGonagall for knowing about Switching Spells” (1997, p. 155). Because the series is mostly in third person limited, we only notice what Harry notices, and since Hermione is merely annoying to him at this point, we don’t realize how much she is probably suffering. Much like Lily, Hermione is a bright Mudblood calling attention to herself through her academics in a fairly racist school, but unlike Lily, who had Snape to comfort and guide her through her introduction to magic, Hermione is alone. Her obnoxious bragging is most likely her misguided attempt to prove herself, but Harry, who has much more worrisome things to consider, does not give her motivations much thought.

It takes Harry and Ron saving Hermione from the troll for them to accept her, and once they do, she immediately changes. Unlike Harry and Ron, whose major personality developments take the whole series to unravel, Hermione is fairly unchanged from the troll attack onward. Her most obvious characteristic is her brilliance. When Lupin tells her, “You’re the cleverest witch of your age I’ve ever met, Hermione” (1999, p. 346), he is voicing what

all the teachers and students know. Not only is she good with remembering book knowledge, she is also gifted with potions, spells and charms, as when she successfully performs Memory Charms on Dolohov and Rowle although she only knows the theory behind them (2007, p. 166). Even though she’s hopeless at Quidditch and doesn’t like riding brooms, she’s not physically weak, withstanding Bellatrix’s torture so well that she’s able to invent a lie about the sword of Gryffindor in the middle of her pain. The films intensify Hermione’s physical power. While in the books she slaps Malfoy in order to defend Hagrid, she punches him in the adaptation, a strong, cathartic punch that we get to watch twice from different angles since we revisit it with the Time-Turner. Beginning with Alfonso Cuarón’s *PoA* (2004), the films’ Hermione is as agile and strong as Ron and Harry, often running faster than they do and taking physical distress in stride in ways that she doesn’t seem to in the books.

The books and adaptations do agree on Hermione’s toughness and resilience in one area: emotionally. While both Harry and Ron break down, attack each other and lose hope during the Horcrux search, Hermione remains focused and committed to the task, even when she’s brokenhearted over Ron’s abandonment. In the film adaptation, we hear Hermione pitifully calling after Ron when he leaves. The scene is more painful than Harry’s description of it in the book because we can hear the distress in her voice. The films make Hermione even more important than she is in the books because they are not as limited to Harry’s perception. Although much of the adaptations is still tied to Harry’s point of view, we see Emma Watson’s portrayal on the screen and are able to attach ourselves to her individually in ways that we can’t when we’re seeing her only through Harry’s eyes and words.

Although Hermione is more physically agile in the films, her undeniably feminist moments appear only in the books. Whenever Harry and Ron assume someone is male, as in the case of the Half-Blood Prince and R.A.B., she reminds them that the person could also be female. She chastises Ron for saying that he and Harry “don’t want to end up with a pair of trolls” at the ball (2000, p. 394), showing him how shallow his idea sounds. It turns out she’s right because, although very pretty, his partner Padma Patil has nothing in common with him and he can’t even be bothered to ask her to dance. Hermione explains that her smooth hair from the dance is due to her applying Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion, “but it’s way too much bother to do everyday” (2000, p. 433). Although there’s been a backlash against Second Wave feminists’ condemnation of makeup and other beauty rituals, many Third Wave feminists still feel, much like Hermione, that spending too much time on their appearance keeps them from other more engaging or nourishing pursuits.

Besides her bushy hair, we're told by Harry that Hermione has "rather large front teeth" (1997, p. 105). Pansy Parkinson puts it more bluntly when she compares her to a chipmunk (2000, p. 316). It is not until Malfoy hexes her by enlarging her teeth even more that Hermione solves the problem by letting Madame Pomfrey shrink them further than they naturally go. She explains that she'd been asking her dentist parents to let her shrink them magically for years but they wanted her to continue wearing braces instead (2000, p. 405). Placing her parents' wishes before her looks, she withstands four years of teasing over her teeth when she could have fixed them from the beginning, again showing that she values other things, like her relationships, above beauty. She does finally give in, but since changing her teeth would be considered normal in the magical world, it's not as big a step as it may seem to Muggles like her parents.

The film adaptations do not comply with the books' description of Hermione's hair and teeth. Instead they cast Watson, whose unremarkable teeth give her a traditionally attractive smile, and whose shiny, multihued hair is so iconic that the first thing she did when she finished the series was cut it, explaining that her new hairstyle allowed her to finally have her own identity (Fulton, 2011). Film being a visual medium and Hermione being the closest we have to a female protagonist, it would have been revolutionary if Chris Columbus and his team had cast a girl who was anything but traditionally beautiful to play the part. Although beauty is indeed subjective, the film industry has certain parameters for who they will present as beautiful on screen and big-budget, mainstream films rarely deviate from them. While Rowling's message that bushy-haired and big-toothed girls can be just as central and heroic is lost in the films, Watson's looks have contributed to her becoming a powerful screen presence. By casting someone who is visually appealing in a traditional Hollywood way, the films have turned her into an even more compelling character for many audience members who expect leading actors to be good looking. Moreover, they have kept her beauty desexualized, usually dressing her in jeans, shirts and hoodies that match the spirit of Hermione in the books.

In her study of women's relationships to celebrities, Jackie Stacey found that they are seen "as out of reach, and belonging to a different world plane of existence" (1999, p. 199). And yet, in spite of the great barrier women perceive between them and the celebrities they admire, there is a desire to cross over and experience life through a celebrity's perspective, so that "the difference between the female star and the female spectator is a source of fascination not only with ideals of physical beauty, but also with the stars' personalities and behavior" (1999, p. 201). It isn't just what female celebrities wear but also what they do and how they behave that is alluring to their fans. Moreover,

when dealing with young fans and young celebrities, differentiating the actor from the character they play becomes exceedingly difficult. With child actors working for the first time, like the Harry Potter trio, audiences have no other characters to compare them to, so that particular role becomes their identity. This is not so much of an issue with shorter projects, since the actor then moves on to other roles and changes audience perspectives. However, besides lending her voice to the animated film *The Tale of Despereaux* and costarring in the made-for-TV movie *Ballet Shoes*, Watson has remained committed to the series exclusively, cementing the notion that she is indeed like Hermione.

Young audiences in particular fall in love with film characters and would like to believe that they exist somewhere. And who better to embody them than the people who bring them to life on the screen? To increase similarities, Watson's life, as far as the media has portrayed it, is not so different from Hermione's. As Watson herself explains, "I probably started out more like [Hermione] and got less like her. I'm very heady and intellectual and we're very similar in that way — we're very eager to please and need approval" (Fulton, 2011). Not only has she managed to survive a nearly scandal-free adolescence under the famously ravenous British paparazzi regime, the fact that she attends Brown University helps support her statement that, like Hermione, she has a good mind for academics. She has also proven her political conscience through her work as creative advisor with Tree People, a clothing company using organic cotton and Fair Trade to better the lives of workers in Bangladesh, India and Nepal (Olins, 2011). Having contacted Tree People herself, Watson worked on the collection and arranged the photo shoot for the collection's advertising, getting her friends to be both models and crew members for no remuneration (Carroll, 2010). The clothes look comfortable and not overly sexual, similar to the outfits Hermione wears in the film adaptations. Moreover, Watson's choice to provide an alternative to purchasing clothes made in sweatshops or by underpaid workers resembles Hermione's efforts to free house elves in the series. Even though Columbus and his team could not have foreseen it when they cast the nine-year-old Watson, the fact that she seems to so closely resemble Hermione in her life choices has increased her character's influence with audiences, adding weight to Hermione's feminist message.

Part of Hermione's value to young readers comes from the fact that much like Molly, she is imperfect. It is important for Hermione to be flawed in some ways because she is the character many of the female — and some of the male — audience aspire to be, and it would be unhealthy and unrealistic for her to be perfect. She is often unnecessarily neurotic about schoolwork, showing a lack of self-confidence and annoying her friends and perhaps her readers with her nervousness. Most of her immature moments relate to her unfulfilled



relationship with Ron, however. Even though she is usually secure about her looks, she becomes jealous of Ron's infatuations with Fleur and Madam Rosmerta. Understandably she is brokenhearted when Ron starts going out with Lavender, but her retaliation, to invite Cormac McLaggen to Slughorn's Christmas party, backfires since he "makes Grawp look a gentleman" (2000, p. 317). She thus suffers herself in her attempt to hurt Ron.

The film adaptations, especially *PoA* (Columbus, 2004), increase the sexual tension and downplay the arguing between Hermione and Ron. While she can hold hands with Harry naturally during their Time Turner adventure, when she holds hands with Ron, it's always awkward and they quickly let go. By focusing on their sexual awakening and not their arguments, Cuarón manages a similar effect to the books and does it successfully, since these sorts of gestures are very effective on film, especially when we don't need to see them through Harry's perspective and can experience them directly. Even though Hermione's immaturity arises through her relationship with Ron, she doesn't spend the series pining for him. As a matter of fact, Ron starts his relationship with Lavender to punish Hermione for her physical involvement with Viktor. She not only dates Viktor while he's at Hogwarts, but continues corresponding with him throughout the series in spite of Ron's loud objections to their friendship. Even though she loves Ron, she will not let him control her relationships.

Perhaps Hermione's strongest feminist characteristic is her willingness to break the rules in order to fight for equality and the wellbeing of others. Although she is usually a stickler for the rules, she has no problem rebelling if she thinks the cause is worthy. When Harry and Ron are unsure about making the Polyjuice Potion in order to spy on Malfoy, she tells them, "I don't want to break rules, you know. I think threatening Muggle-borns is far worse than brewing up a difficult potion" (1999, p. 165). She even steals from Dumbledore days after his death, using a Summoning Charm to retrieve the Horcrux books he removed from the library. Although she feels guilty about her actions, she realizes that without them, innocent people and creatures will suffer. Thus, like thousands of feminists before her, she transcends the rules in order to create a more just world.

### *Becoming Lily*

Hermione's involvement with political struggles and with freeing the wizarding world from Voldemort springs from her keen ability to, like Lily, sense the suffering of others. From the first book we see her protect Neville. When he arrives at Gryffindor with a Leg-Locker Curse, "Everyone fell over

laughing except Hermione, who leapt up and performed the countercurse" (1997, p. 217). She is the only one to stand up to the twins when they start testing their products on first-year students, threatening in her knowledge of maternal power to let Molly know what they're doing. Her compassion is not limited to humans but also to other creatures. She protects Lupin, hiding the fact that he's a werewolf, questions anti-giant prejudice, and when Ron doubts the Goblin version of Godric Gryffindor's behavior, reminds him that "[w]izarding history often skates over what the wizards have done to other magical races" (2007, p. 506). Her biggest foray in helping others, however, is her attempt to fight for elf rights, which is not featured in the films.

As Brycchan Carey explains, "Unlike Harry, whose response to the problem was largely personal, Hermione sees the problem as a public one, requiring political engagement to reach public solutions. Moreover, her description of the magical world is accurate. The house-elves are indeed in slavery" (2003, p. 105). Harry frees Dobby because he likes him and does not want him to suffer under the Malfoys. He is unable to take Dobby's experience, however, and see how other elves may be experiencing a similar fate. It takes Hermione's keen eye for suffering and politics to understand that things need to change. While her awareness is admirable, her campaign through S.P.E.W. (Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare) is one of Hermione's only failures in the series. Not only is she unable to recruit any willing members for the Society, her attempts to make elves see that they have "the right to wages and holidays and proper clothes" (2000, p. 538) only terrify them. It seems so obvious to her that they are being enslaved that she is unable to put herself in their shoes and see how threatening her ideas must seem to them. Moreover, her borderline immoral attempts to free them against their will by leaving concealed clothes for them in Gryffindor insult their intelligence and end up causing Dobby to overwork himself, since no other elves will clean Gryffindor.

In her feminist blog *Deeply Problematic*, Rachel McCarthy James argues that with S.P.E.W., Hermione "participates in the grand feminist tradition of devaluing, disregarding and silencing oppressed classes while centering herself and her opinions on their marginalization" (James, 2001). Though James does not say whether she thinks Rowling did this as a criticism of the feminist movement or by accident, James argues that Hermione's actions make her character reprehensible. James's critique of feminism has been voiced by scholars like bell hooks, Lynet Utral and Cherríe Moraga, who find the primarily white, straight and financially privileged Second Wave feminist movement to both silence and misrepresent women of color, lesbians, working-class women, etc. While that was, and in many cases still is, a valid criticism of feminism, I would argue that it is unfair to direct it at Hermione.

James makes the very good point that S.P.E.W. "is rotten at its core

because it is led by a witch rather than an elf" (James, 2011). It would have, of course, been much better for Hermione to have a supporting role, but being a fifteen-year-old faced with a terrible situation, she rashly chooses to act right away. There being no elf rights movement at that point, she tries to start one. Her main error comes in trying to convince other wizards to join her before she tries to talk to the elves themselves to see if there's interest in her revolution. James attributes her choice to the fact that "Hermione considers elves lesser creatures who need protection" (James, 2011). However, I would argue it's rather a matter of access — since elves are practically invisible at Hogwarts. When she finally gets to speak to the elves, however, she realizes that the problem is much greater than she thought, since they don't want to be freed. Her inability to communicate her emancipatory ideas to the elves leads to her terribly misguided attempts to free them against their will — Hermione's worst actions in the whole series. James believes that Hermione behaves this way because she is upset that elves do not "regard her as their glorious liberator witch, better than all the other witches" (James, 2011). However, this goes against her personality throughout the series. While Ron is often jealous of Harry's celebrity and its perks, Hermione isn't. She is more instrumental than Ron in Harry's success but feels no need to flaunt her participation. It makes no sense, then, for her to then seek glory through her work with the elves. I would argue that Hermione's efforts are not "malicious" as James claims, but rather those of a burgeoning, overenthusiastic feminist with no knowledge of how to start a political movement.

In the end, Hermione becomes distracted by Voldemort and his Death Eaters and lets go of her campaign. Her only real contribution to elf welfare turns out to be as personal as Harry's, when she convinces him to treat Kreacher kindly, thus bringing out a completely different elf in him. It is perhaps appropriate that Hermione's only success in elf rights should be through Harry, since one of her main roles in the novel is to fill some of the void left by Lily. While Molly provides the physical aspects of motherhood, feeding him and looking after his possessions, as well as protective love and concern for his safety, Hermione guides him through adolescence, helping him mature emotionally and become the student, wizard and human being he needs to be in order to defeat Voldemort. Gallardo-C and Smith argue that "[e]ven Harry's friend Hermione, like Professor Minerva McGonagall, eventually becomes a mother figure for Ron and Harry. Clearly the text implies that the primary role of women in society is the care, socialization, and education of men *at any cost*" (2003, p. 193). However, although Hermione does adopt a maternal role toward Harry, she doesn't seem to give up anything in order to do so. Her major sacrifices such as quitting school and erasing herself from her parents' memories are not about taking care of Harry but about destroying

Voldemort, which is not a matter of looking after him, but of saving the wizarding world — herself included — from a terrible fate.

Many of Hermione's actions toward Harry are close to what Lily presumably would have done in helping her son succeed in life. Hermione checks Ron and Harry's homework but she "would never let them copy" arguing that otherwise they will not learn (1997, p. 182). Being more advanced in magic than Harry, as Lily would have been, she teaches him to become a better wizard such as when she helps him learn the Summoning Charm for the Triwizard Tournament. She also saves him as Lily did, getting him out of Bathilda's house alive and jinxing his face so the snatchers won't recognize him when they capture him. Once they are searching for the Horcruxes, she becomes his conscience as Dumbledore had hoped she would, reminding him to close down his mind from Voldemort and focus on the task at hand, to the point that he starts hiding his visions from her. Although Hermione is only months older than he is, her maturity level helps her become the person whose lectures Harry fears as he would Lily's. Like the Weasleys with Molly, he doesn't want to disappoint her because he knows her criticisms stem from love and the correct sense of what he needs to do.

In spite of her brilliance, Hermione's most important mothering support is not intellectual but emotional. Observant and intuitive like an effective mother, she knows the secrets Harry is trying to hide, like his crushes on both Cho and Ginny, using this knowledge to gently help Harry learn to navigate the female psyche. After she explains the many conflicting emotions Cho must be feeling about being with Harry, Ron tells her, "One person can't feel all that at once, they'd explode" (2003, p. 459), voicing Harry's own confusion, and why her guidance, which Lily would have provided, is so vital to him. Because she knows Harry so well, Hermione is able to provide him with the advice and support he needs to hear at particularly trying times. When he must go after the Sorcerer's Stone alone, she tells him what a great wizard he is. To his reply that he's not as good as she is, she responds, "'Books! And cleverness! There are more important things — friendship and bravery'" (1997, p. 287), emphasizing that he possesses the very qualities he later uses to defeat Quirrell and Voldemort.

She again praises his abilities when asking him to become their Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. After he complains that she has done better on every test, she tells him that he beat her during their third year, "the only year we both sat the test and had a teacher who actually knew the subject. But I'm not talking about test results, Harry. Look what you've *done!*" (2003, p. 326). For someone who is so concerned about her grades, Hermione is well aware of the value of actions outside the classroom, and in those, she reminds Harry, he excels. By downplaying the value of academic achievement in order

to make Harry feel better about himself, she may be selling herself short, something that mothers at times do in order to make their children feel accomplished when they doubt themselves. By the end of the series, however, Hermione has shown herself to be as gifted as Harry at surviving danger outside the classroom, making her comments on the value of "doing" applicable to herself as well. Like maternal figures in the real world, she has grown through her mothering in ways that go beyond taking care of others to transforming herself into a more powerful and competent person all around.

Knowing about Harry's need for parental replacements, she keeps reassuring him that Dumbledore loved him whenever Harry begins to doubt his mentor's motivations after Rita Skeeter's book tarnishes his reputation. Her emotional support of Harry, however, does not only come in the form of praise or loving words. She also, as effective mothers must often do, tells him the truths he doesn't want to hear. When Harry's adolescent anger keeps raging in *OotP*, she says, "it would be quite nice if you stopped jumping down Ron's and my throats, Harry, because if you haven't noticed, we're on your side" (2003, p. 223). She also explains, very gently, that Harry has a "saving-people-thing" (2003, p. 733), which Voldemort may be using to lure him into a trap by pretending to have Sirius. Although her comment greatly upsets him, after Sirius dies he wishes he had "opened his mind to the possibility that Voldemort was, as Hermione had said, banking on Harry's love of playing the hero" (2003, p. 820). As children ideally do with their parents, Harry begins to realize that Hermione has been right about most of the things she has advised him throughout the years, allowing Rowling to instill in young readers the importance of valuing their own parental figures.

Hermione's maternal role is trickier in the films because while we can choose to imagine a seemingly older Hermione in the books, in the movies we see that she is clearly Harry's age. Watson's performance, both mature and caring, however, captures Hermione's spirit in spite of the actors' youth. *DH Part 1* especially plays with the maternal angle of their relationship, showing Hermione cutting Harry's hair and later tenderly messing with it, telling him, "Don't ever let me give you a haircut again" (Barron, 2010). While Molly can no doubt cut hair well, Hermione's ease with mothering stops at the emotional and intellectual level. It is also in *DH Part 1* that we see Harry try to return Hermione's caring in a scene that is not in the book. When a romantic song appears on the radio, he takes the Horcrux off her, throws it on the bed and begins to dance with her. It's funny, bad dancing on his part. He's clearly clowning around to cheer her up after Ron has left. She laughs and holds on to him with no hint of sexual tension. She becomes distressed again at the end of the song, however, and he looks at her sadly, knowing that his distraction was only momentary. Harry has understood how much Hermione

has done for him and wants to do something for her in return, but like most children, he learns that there are some sorrows parental figures experience that children have no control over; just like, at some point, parents stop being able to soothe their children's pain. In that goofy, dancing moment, Harry seems to grow up.

Although Harry Potter is a series told through the eyes of its male protagonist, feminist ideas and an exploration and celebration of motherhood's complexities and triumphs pervade the books and their film adaptations. Harry must not only understand his mother's sacrifice, he must also decide to repeat it in order to defeat Voldemort, whose ignorance of maternal love starts with his own mother's death at his birth. Even though much of Harry's journey to his own sacrifice comes from making sense of his mother's life and motivations, he is aided by other maternal figures. Both Molly and Hermione come together to fill different areas of the void left by Lily in Harry's life, providing him with the support he needs to grow up into the man who will defeat Voldemort. Although much of the story does deal with women helping Harry and other children grow up, which could be considered antifeminist by having women spend much effort taking care of others and not themselves, Rowling manages to weave strong feminist ideals into her tale. In spite of being a housewife, Molly is a fierce disciplinarian and warrior while also having nourishing, doting qualities without visible conflict. Hermione, on her part, manages to balance what many of her fellow Third Wave feminists struggle with: professional and personal fulfillment as well as mothering others. Through Hermione, Rowling makes an argument to her young readers and the films' audiences that women can indeed have it all if they make the right choices as Hermione does.

### Notes

1. Even though I realize that there is no such thing as feminism per se but rather a multiplicity of feminisms, I will refer to the word in the singular for the sake of readability and to avoid confusion. I will also make distinctions between Second and Third Wave feminism. Although some of the characteristics I claim belong to these waves do not represent every member or strand of that particular feminist era, they are agreed upon generalizations that I need to use in order to make a cohesive argument.

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## Alohomora!

### Unlocking Hermione's Feminism

SARAH MARGARET KNIESLER

"Young women, I would say, and please attend, for the peroration is beginning, you are, in my opinion, disgracefully ignorant. You have never made a discovery of any sort of importance. You have never shaken an empire or led an army into battle. [...] What is your excuse?"

—Woolf 1929, 146-7.

"But Ron was staring at Hermione as though suddenly seeing her in a whole new light. 'Hermione, Neville's right—you are a girl....'"

—Rowling 2000, 400.

Recognition of the history of women's writing — their authorship, their role in fiction, and their presence in the literary canon — has been severely lacking over the last century. Despite the fact that Virginia Woolf published her extended essay *A Room of One's Own* in 1929, prominently upheld scholarly traditions continue to be dictated by patriarchal values and norms. The continued relegation of women to a secondary status within the literary sphere is the result of a cyclical pattern of exclusion; the appreciation of male-authored literature and male characters over female-authored literature and female characters at an advanced level is simultaneously reinforcing and being bolstered by the assumptions made about literature for children and young adults.

When searching for a suitable read for an adolescent, consumers are often found asking for a "boy book" or a "girl book." In her article entitled "Guys Read Guy Books," Mary Jacobs (2008) reduces boys' reading habits to sweeping generalizations, expounding upon a popular supposition held by today's society: "Boys read less fiction than girls but tend to enjoy escapism and humor. Many boys are passionate about science fiction and fantasy. They like to read stories about their interests such as those related to hobbies or sports" (Jacobs n.pag.). As opposed to catering to the interests of the child, the wide-