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Melanie J. Cordova

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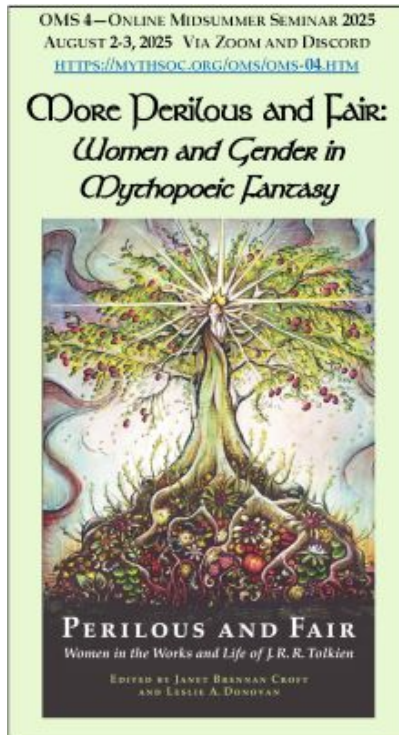
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### "Because I'm a Girl, I Suppose!": Gender Lines and Narrative Perspective in *Harry Potter*

#### Abstract

Explores one of the interesting challenges in reading the Harry Potter series: the reader must eventually face the fact that Harry is not a totally reliable narrator or viewpoint character, especially as far as the female characters closest to him are concerned. Hermione especially suffers from his "teenage boy myopia."

#### Additional Keywords

Rowling, J.K.—Characters—Harry Potter; Rowling, J.K.—Characters—Hermione Granger; Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter novels; Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter novels—Unreliable narrators

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BECAUSE I'M A GIRL, I SUPPOSE!":  
GENDER LINES AND NARRATIVE  
PERSPECTIVE IN *HARRY POTTER*

MELANIE J. CORDOVA

NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

*HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS*, the seventh and final book in the *Harry Potter* series, is the most up-to-date picture of Hermione that author J.K. Rowling has provided for her readers. In this book, Hermione is a young woman of seventeen who can reasonably be assumed the agent and speaker of her own destiny. She has been interpreted as capable, knowledgeable, and fairly self-assured, but it is not enough that Hermione acts alongside her fellow heroes in the series. As Elizabeth E. Heilman writes in "Blue Wizards and Pink Witches: Representations of Gender Identity and Power": "It is not simply who is present, but, also, how characters are portrayed and what they do that matters" (223). The primary complication for Hermione is that her story is seen through Harry's eyes. This article will address the consequences of Harry's perspective on Hermione. As one of the heroes and the young woman in closest proximity to the origin perspective, her fate is different than those who are further away. I argue that there is a constellation of proximity revolving around Harry's perspective, with Hermione being the closest, Lily the furthest, and Ginny, Molly, Luna, McGonagall, and Bellatrix at varying points in between. It would of course be problematic to assume that Harry is the Sun around which all other characters must revolve, but considering the close narrative stance and the eponymous title, his perspective is, and should be, naturally prioritized. Hermione's story arc, according to Eliza T. Dresang in "Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender," was established "from the moment that she is chosen for Gryffindor to be brave at heart, to show daring, nerve, and chivalry" (228). Heilman, by contrast, calls her "bookish" (224) and implies that her inconsistent competence is far inferior to the innate knowledge Harry and Ron possess. I argue that Harry's perspective is the final word on her, and that strong women in this series tend to fare better the further away from Harry they are. His myopic perspective of Hermione relegates her to stereotype and either ignores or misunderstands her full potential. She is Harry's blind spot for the seven years we see her.



### INTERPRETIVE PROXIMITY

In the grand scheme of the narrative, the women who fare rather well in *Harry Potter* tend to be further away from Harry. Viewing this as a constellation, Harry is the Sun and the women are planets at varying distances from him; those closest are the most scorched. Michelle Yeo, in "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets: Feminist Interpretations/Jungian Dreams," comments that early on in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* "there is a superficial nod to gender equality that only masks a deeply entrenched patriarchal structure in the collective unconscious" (2). Harry's perspective perhaps portrays the world's inequalities too accurately for comfort. After Hermione, the woman he is most in contact with is Ginny. Through his perspective, we see her sexual activity with young men at Hogwarts and feel uncomfortable with Harry at this choice. In the final book, Ginny is auxiliary, not worth taking on the adventure with the heroes, but her sexual nature keeps her of value for a kiss (and kids) at the end. After Ginny comes Molly in terms of closeness to the original point-of-view. As Ron's mother, she fills a gap in Harry's life after his welcome into the wizarding world. He sees her as loving, motherly, and giving. Through his eyes, her confrontation with Bellatrix in the final book is a natural culmination of her motherly role—a mother bear protecting her cubs—and any flaws are overprotection, to the point of the heroes preparing for adventure in secret, and the fact that she is not biologically his mother. Luna and McGonagall are next on this relationship constellation. Luna is closer to Harry and fares worse. She is considered rather silly, especially at first, but because of her actual narrative distance, winds up interpreted as noble, patient, and brave, as during her imprisonment in Malfoy Manor or during the Battle of Hogwarts. McGonagall occupies much of the same knowledge-bearer role as Hermione but with fewer consequences. She is portrayed as wise, old, and with the same protective elements he admires in Molly. His admiration for Luna's creativity and McGonagall's power and knowledge is due largely to their relative narrative distance. He has had less time to reinterpret them as a close third person.

Bellatrix, even as the primary female villain, is afforded more power and ability because of her distance. Despite the fact that Harry has labeled her evil, she appears as brilliant and talented: "She was a witch, as Harry knew, with prodigious skill and no conscience" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* [DH] 461). She suspects the Snatchers found the real Gryffindor sword and stuns them, and she is able to duel Hermione, Luna, and Ginny all at once. She and Lily embody a mythos on an opposite axis—hate versus love. On Bellatrix's end, we see her power and determination clearly, like when she tortures Hermione or begs Voldemort to let her kill Harry for him. Harry does not hesitate to acknowledge her power and danger. For Lily, however, by the



end of *Deathly Hallows*, he has created an equally powerful mythos. She is the furthest in this constellation I have sketched. She is reinterpreted after death by various characters to Harry: a brilliant student, popular in school, kind, beautiful, and a mother willing to die to defend her child. The Lily mythos is strong and unbreakable. Even in the nuancing perspective of Snape's memories she is only enhanced. As the furthest away from Harry—literally deceased—his want to interpret and present his mother coalesces with the mythos he has built around her, which results in her emerging from the series entirely unscathed by his critical point-of-view. My focus for this argument is Hermione, and while the other characters' relationship and position relative to Harry are important, hers takes priority for this analysis as the young woman in closest narrative contact with him.

#### NARRATIVE BLIND SPOT

There are limits on how well Harry can see Hermione occupy certain roles. Just as, for example, McGonagall's character is altered to readers by her position relative to Harry, because Hermione is so close, she bears the brunt of his critical eye. In her, a flaw that might make a real person human is connected to her worth as a character. Harry seems conditioned to apply such rules to himself as well. As Heilman writes: "In order for a theory of gender identity to be inclusive, gender identity conventions must be understood as *equally though differently alienating* for men and for women" (230, emphasis in original). Accordingly, Heilman is concerned not only with how Hermione is forced into particular roles, but also with how characters like Harry are forced into being a particular type of masculine. Similarly, Meredith Cherland, in her article "Harry's Girls: Harry Potter and the Discourse of Gender," claims that there are many subject positions which both men and women can assume, except that these subject positions are determined by the hierarchy of a male/female binary (279). The idea of a male/female binary is of course a simplistic way of interpreting this series, but it would seem that this is Harry's point of departure for viewing the women in his life. Other critics who find strong female characters lacking in *Harry Potter* did so through thorough analysis of major issues that intersect with them within these texts, such as Ruthann Mayes-Elma in *Females and Harry Potter: Not All That Empowering* and Kathryn N. McDaniel in "The Elfin Mystique: Fantasy and Feminism in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series." Similarly, Yeo arrives at this conclusion through a psychological analysis. I would contend that Harry's point-of-view is merely conditioned by the Muggle world. He sees Hermione's famous position as a knowledge-bearer but interprets it differently than perhaps she herself would. Her proficiency as knowledge-bearer is either displayed in a motherly way, is undermined by language that renders her hysterical, or by behavior that



renders her servile. Her proximity to Harry prevents her from being seen as embodying a role well; indeed, she does occupy the position of knowledge-bearer in a powerful way, but his point-of-view complicates its display.

### *Motherly Figure*

The intersection of Hermione's knowledge-bearer position and that of a motherly figure can be quite a positive representation of a young woman, but the fact that it is Harry who applies the motherly layer to Hermione makes the representation less Hermione's choice and more Harry's vision for the women around him. Added to this is of course the idea that there is no possible way Hermione could fulfill the Lily mythos built in his imagination. When the heroes initially go into hiding, it is Hermione's foresight that enables them to have all of the provisions that they need for survival: their tent, changes of clothes, research materials, and so on. She explains: "'Undetectable Extension Charm,' said Hermione. 'Tricky, but I think I've done it okay; anyway, I managed to fit everything we need in here.' She gave the fragile-looking bag a little shake and it echoed like a cargo hold as a number of heavy objects rolled around inside it" (*DH* 162). She is here depicted as someone who provides for others when they are perhaps not thinking far enough ahead, like a parent packing lunch for school. Her foresight is clearly valuable for the group, but the attendant gender associations increase as the book progresses, until its reversal by Rowling almost reads as an afterthought. She writes:

"Well, don't bother increasing this, it's disgusting," said Ron.

"Harry caught the fish and I did my best with it! I notice I'm always the one who ends up sorting out the food, because I'm a *girl*, I suppose!"

"No, it's because you're supposed to be the best at magic!" shot back Ron. (293, emphasis in original)

Rowling's inclusion of Hermione's suspicion that she is providing for them because of her gender paints a picture of Hermione as a reluctant caretaker. Ron's reply connects Hermione's behavior back with the knowledge-bearer role that she has steadily occupied more willingly throughout the series.

A motherly figure who is proficient at magic is a positive representation, but one applied by Harry, not Hermione herself. While the group is camping, Hermione usually cooks for her friends and heals their injuries, which Harry mentions she can do much earlier in the novel (*DH* 14). Even positioning her this way so early, however, is unconvincing to Cherland, who decides that female characters in the series support the societal status quo, citing many inconsistencies in Hermione's character that make her "one of the least credible characters in the series" (Cherland 278). Heilman also cites



certain inconsistencies, namely that women in general have been stereotyped (Heilman 227) and that Hermione is backhandedly included in adventures (224), in this case as the mother figure. While this does allow Hermione to hold a rather elevated position in the group, and at times—though certainly not consistently—allows her to embody the traits of logic and calmness, it puts her in a position of using that knowledge for the others' benefit, never truly her own. She indirectly comments on this when Harry and Ron question her about what she has been doing with all of their things even before they leave the Burrow: "'Let's see,' said Hermione, slamming *Travels with Trolls* onto the discarded pile with a rather fierce look. 'I've been packing for days, so we're ready to leave at a moment's notice, which for your information has included doing some pretty difficult magic, not to mention smuggling Mad-Eye's whole stock of Polyjuice Potion right under Ron's mum's nose'" (DH 96). By calling it "difficult magic," Hermione implies that the other two would not be able to do it correctly, and she must therefore pick up the slack. Her slamming of the book implies she is not happy with that fact. While she may be proficient at magic and willing to share that knowledge to care for her friends, shoehorning her into a role she has not chosen illuminates Harry's perspective. He seeks the Lily mythos, and it is unsurprising Hermione does not fulfill it.

Hermione's active participation in the first several books is upheld by the notion of magic being an equalizing force. For example, Dresang argues that there is enough evidence in the first four books to be "considerably more optimistic about Hermione's self-determination" (226) and that we see her growing as a stronger character as the series progresses. She has opportunities to succeed through what Janet Brennan Croft claims is an equal opportunity at life in the wizarding world: "There seems to be no expectation that girls will excel at some classes and not at others, or that they will demonstrate any less athletic talent than their Quidditch teammates" (135). Croft acknowledges in her article "The Education of a Witch: Tiffany Aching, Hermione Granger, and Gendered Magic in Discworld and Potterworld" that though there may be some subtle gender stereotyping in the books, magic has the ability to level the playing field. This is perhaps why, according to Dresang, Hermione shows promise in her social development with Harry and Ron (Dresang 221) and in her love of knowledge (222). Dresang and Croft are echoed and supported by Jes Battis in "Transgendered Magic: The Radical Performance of the Young Wizard in YA Literature." Ultimately, I contend that this potential is limited because of the narrative perspective. Even when Hermione's knowledge-bearer role is not given motherly shades, it is undermined by certain factors in Harry's eyes that will not allow her to occupy it completely. Often, when Hermione exhibits the strong use of her knowledge-bearer role, the writing either quickly diminishes her power with unfortunate language descriptors or



Hermione must suffer the consequences of her magical prowess, which several times involves her spells having unintended consequences. Harry's interpretation of her behavior, both when she's present and absent, show his myopic vision of her.

*Undermined by Language*

Hermione's knowledge-bearer role is touched by stereotype when dialogue tags and language descriptors are applied to her. After Ron returns to the friends he abandoned in the forest, Hermione confronts him. Harry's perspective as a seventeen-year-old boy is painfully obvious. Her laughing is described as "a high-pitched, out-of-control sound" and she speaks "with awful sarcasm" (*DH* 381) to injure Ron. Further, Harry observes: "Her voice was now so shrill only bats would be able to hear it soon, but she had reached a level of indignation that rendered her temporarily speechless" (381). These descriptions and minor jabs at Hermione's behavior tremendously undermine her. This is only one step removed from the hysterical woman and all its historical ramifications. Dresang agrees that there are "gender-biased words" (237) in the series, and Battis notices a trend as well, writing: "Powerful female wizards (such as Hermione in *Harry Potter*) find themselves doing or saying things that deliberately undermine the power of their magic" (Battis ¶2). Hermione's magic, the physical extension of her knowledge, is handicapped in this respect. And even with her knowledge, Hermione is positioned in such a way that even Ron—oafish, clumsy Ron—can be seen as more logical. Cherland suggests that this was present in book four, for example in the House-Elf issue: "[Ron] positions himself as a man of reason. Together Hermione and Ron enact the binary of male/female and of rational/irrational. Again, we are presented with gendered subject positions we can take up and use to construct ourselves and our ways of being in the world" (279). This is Harry's mind in action, making sense of the wizarding world in the easy false binaries of the Muggle one. Hermione's proximity as his close friend clouds his interpretation.

Such undermining language descriptors are present in more than the reunion scene, however. Later, Harry, Hermione, and Ron infiltrate the Ministry of Magic in search of Salazar Slytherin's locket, which is in Dolores Umbridge's possession. After sneaking into the Ministry using Polyjuice Potion, the three are separated and put in dangerous positions. While Ron is sent to do repairs, Harry attempts to free innocent people from prosecution by a court led by Umbridge herself. Hermione is with Umbridge as a secretary, and during the trial of Mrs. Cattermole, Harry stuns Umbridge and her assistant Yaxley. Hermione takes the locket from Umbridge's neck and replicates it with a Geminio spell (*DH* 263). She also shows her knowledge by



releasing Mrs. Cattermole from her chains. Again, this is Hermione fulfilling her knowledge-bearer role by powerfully using the spells she knows to endure a difficult situation. At this point, however, Rowling tempers her skill. Hermione, on the same page that shows her abilities, is unable to do the Patronus charm and then later reverts to dialogue tags like "squeaked" (265). Rowling explains her inability to do the spell through Harry, who says to Mrs. Cattermole in an aside: "It's the only spell she ever has trouble with" (263). Harry takes the liberty of interpreting her behavior to others verbally after his point-of-view has already presented it to us similarly on the page. This is typical, of course, as Harry interprets even her present, and absent, behavior as he wishes.

#### *Undermined by Presence and Absence*

Hermione inhabiting the knowledge-bearer role is a powerful thing to read, but in only a few moments its display is clouded by Harry's perspective. His proximity to his friend is too close for narrative comfort; he misunderstands her when she is present and places her in traditional stereotypes. Mayes-Elma remarks that "this sort of traditional gendered construction is not surprising. Throughout the text, traditional constructions of males and females prevail time and time again" (91). Hermione's behavior at camp certainly perpetuates this, and it has a hampering effect on the reader's perception of her. The story—as a close third-person—and Harry—as a teenager—complicate her presentation, even when she uses her knowledge well. One such example of this is in chapter nine of *Deathly Hallows*, "A Place to Hide." The three heroes have escaped the wedding through Hermione's quick-minded Disapparation spell and find themselves in Tottenham Court Road (163). Quickly entering a café, they confront two Death Eaters, who attack the unsuspecting heroes. Harry stops one of them and Hermione stops the other. After this she is able to do the difficult Obliviate spell to wipe the memories of all present (167). Hermione's quick actions in the café show that she is the mistress of her knowledge, but Harry's perspective only allows her to use it in the framework with which he is familiar. After demonstrating her prowess, Hermione reverts back to stereotype: "'Never mind what they're called!' said Hermione a little hysterically. 'How did they find us? What are we going to do?'" (166). Rowling also writes that Hermione "hissed" (167) at Ron, and once the three arrive at Grimmauld Place, she also screamed (170), whimpered (171), and "crouched on the floor by the door with her arms over her head" (171) in fear. This portrait of a knowledge-bearer is troubling. Even when Hermione's knowledge could be useful when they arrive at Grimmauld Place—against the tongue-twisting spell from Mad Eye Moody and the dust-Dumbledore that rises from the carpet—we see her instead cowering with her hands over her



head, unable to do anything at all. In Heilman's study of the first four novels, she writes: "Hermione had been portrayed as a girl who knew a lot of spells, but when she needed to put that knowledge to use, she failed" (222). Because of the narrative perspective, however, this extends to the final book as well. Harry placing her behavior into typical stereotypes undermines any knowledge-bearer role she may attempt to occupy.

A similar situation occurs when Ron returns to his friends in the forest after his long absence. Harry welcomes him back with open arms—the Harry readers know is generous and caring to a fault—but Hermione reacts angrily when the two return to camp (*DH* 380). She screams and yells at Ron for his abandonment and Harry has to use a *Protego* charm to get her to stop hitting him:

The invisible shield erupted between Ron and Hermione: The force of it knocked her backward onto the floor. Spitting hair out of her mouth, she leapt up again.

"Hermione!" said Harry. "Calm—"

"I will not calm down!" she screamed. Never before had he seen her lose control like this; she looked quite demented. "Give me back my wand! *Give it back to me!*"

"Hermione, will you please—"

"Don't you tell me what to do, Harry Potter!" she screeched. (380)

Here, Harry is shown as the rational one who has to stop the hysterical Hermione from doing bodily harm to Ron. Her outrage is presented as irrational—a contrast to his own behavior—and the language Rowling uses to describe her only perpetuates his stereotyping. Harry even says that Hermione "looked quite demented" in her anger, an anger which, all things considered, is rather justified; Ron did abandon the group despite her plea that he stay, and she and Harry had to hide on their own, taking turns wearing the dangerous locket. He significantly weighted their load because of his decision to leave. Rather than describing her outburst as righteous anger, readers see hysterical overreaction. Harry is once again the calm one highlighted favorably by contrast.

There are time when Hermione exhibits behavior as a knowledge-bearer that result in are consequences to her actions that render her servile or in the debt of others. For example, in their escape from the Ministry, Hermione blames herself for Yaxley following them to Grimmauld Place, thus necessitating a new hiding place for the heroes. Harry asks her what happened:



"But then, where's he? Hang on . . . You don't mean he's at Grimmauld Place? He can't get in there?"

Her eyes sparkled with unshed tears as she nodded.

"Harry, I think he can. I—I forced him to let go with a Revulsion Jinx, but I'd already taken him inside the Fidelius Charm's protection. Since Dumbledore died, we're Secret-Keepers, so I've given him the secret, haven't I?"

There was no pretending; Harry was sure she was right. It was a serious blow. (270-71)

This, following her recent demonstrations of proficiency, acts as a consequence of her powerful ability to use magic. In demonstrating her knowledge with the Geminio spell in duplicating the locket and the Relashio spell to free Mrs. Cattermole, she approached inhabiting the knowledge-bearer role on its own, not modified by any motherly or hysterical attributes until Harry translates what she is (not) doing to Mrs. Cattermole in the aside mentioned above. Ultimately she is unsuccessful, however, and though she knows the answer to her Secret-Keeper concern, still defers to others by framing it as a question.

Making others face the consequences of her power appears most poignantly in Godric's Hollow. She and Harry venture there to see his parents's graves and to talk to Bathilda Bagshot. Once with Bagshot, however, Harry is lured away from Hermione and it is revealed that Bagshot is in fact possessed by Voldemort's snake Nagini, who attacks Harry in an upstairs room. Hermione rushes to help him and together they fend off the snake and try to escape. During this escape, Hermione shoots a Blasting Curse at Nagini, but it ricochets around the room and breaks Harry's wand. The two do eventually escape, but both are injured and Harry is wandless. Safely back in their tent, Hermione explains to Harry what happened: "I'm so, so sorry. I think it was me. As we were leaving, you know, the snake was coming for us, and so I cast a Blasting Curse, and it rebounded everywhere, and it must have—must have hit—" (349). Harry is duly upset and wants to repair it, but the damage is too much. As a result, Hermione gives Harry her wand so that he can keep watch, and the two trade until Harry is able to find a new one. Hermione, during this chapter and for some time after, adopts a profusely repentant, servile attitude at what has happened: she has debilitated the true hero and his narrative perspective of the story, throwing herself out of the running entirely.

Harry's destroyed wand is certainly a significant happening, as the wand acts as the symbol of power and agency for every human in the series, regardless of sex. The results of Hermione's actions are twofold: not only does acting as knowledge-bearer take Harry's agency, it also takes away her own. She must now share her wand with Harry—share her power with someone



who must agree *not* to have power in exchange. When she gives Harry her wand after returning from the attack, Harry is clear how he feels about the situation: "Her face glazed with tears, Hermione handed over her wand, and he left her sitting beside his bed, desiring nothing more than to get away from her" (349). His anger, arguably justified because of the severity of the consequence, causes Hermione to adopt a fearful, servile manner toward him in subsequent scenes. Rowling writes: "Hermione looked frightened that he might curse her with her own wand. Her face streaked with tears, she crouched down beside him, two cups of tea trembling in her hands" (351). In reading *Harry Potter*, the audience naturally sympathizes with Harry in his exploits and rages with him against his enemies. Here that rage is directed at Hermione, however, whose close proximity to the hero essentially alters even the readers's sense of events. When she is present, her knowledge-bearer role cannot be unaccompanied or without a modification of Harry's choosing. This renders her either hysterical or servile to a narrative perspective that, while the audience may sympathize with it for most of the series, is ultimately rather selfish.

Sometimes, however, Hermione is simply not available to be misinterpreted at all. Both Dresang (230) and Yeo (1) comment upon Hermione's previous absences in other novels. Most notable of these are those in the second book, when Hermione cannot join the others in the Slytherin common room because she has accidentally transformed herself into a cat (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* [CS] 218) and when she is petrified into stone by the basilisk's reflection (257). Although Dresang argues that Hermione's portrayal is rather positive, she does admit that such an absence is "fairly substantial" (Dresang 230)—and Yeo, a much more critical reader than Dresang, argues that this absence accounts to about of third of the time (Yeo 1). Rowling has certainly set a precedent for Hermione from an early stage, perhaps even stretching back to parts of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* that neglect her as well. It is most shocking to also see such absences in the final book. According to Pinto *et al.*, authors of "Membership Status and Subjective Group Dynamics: Who Triggers the Black Sheep Effect?," Hermione has already passed through the stage of group membership that would excuse these lapses; at this point, she would be in the "maintenance" phase, granting her "more responsibilities for helping the group achieve its goals" (108), simultaneously having been accepted by the others and thus no longer in the "entry" (108) transition that she was in the first book. By excluding her, the group dynamics become less believable and she reverts to being a lesser member of the group; if such absences consistently keep happening—in the imaginary sequels after book seven—she would eventually become a complete outsider. And while Croft claims that in the Wizarding world "[a]ll paths are



equally available to boys and girls" (137), this is not necessarily true among the main protagonists. Certainly, just as in our world, there is the pretense that things are equal, but the actual lay of the land in Harry's mind is often quite the reverse.

The primary way Hermione's knowledge-bearer role is undermined by Harry misunderstanding her absence is when she is destroying Helga Hufflepuff's cup. Every Horcrux destruction except for Hermione's is treated with tantamount importance. The diary shows Voldemort's rise to power and Harry's bravery in saving Ginny; the locket shows Ron dealing with his feelings of inadequacy and reunites the heroes; the diadem shows how Vincent Crabbe's violence backfires and kills him, and provides development for Malfoy and his goons; Nagini shows Neville Longbottom's bravery in the face of evil; Harry's death shows his willingness to die for truth, love, and fairness. Quite literally, the cup's destruction shows nothing, as there is no scene at all.

The only other Horcrux destruction scene that is "off-camera" is the second, Marvolo Gaunt's ring, destroyed by Dumbledore. Although we do not see Dumbledore destroy it, the evidence for its destruction is overpowering in that it cripples Dumbledore's hand and curses him to die within a few months. This creates more character development for Snape and Dumbledore. Not only do we see this awful evidence of the Horcrux's destruction—Rowling describes Dumbledore's withered hand as "blackened and shriveled" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* [HB] 48)—the Headmaster himself is allowed to both say his piece about it and take credit. He explains:

I stumbled across the ring hidden in the ruin of the Gaunts' house. It seems that once Voldemort had succeeded in sealing a piece of his soul inside it, he did not want to wear it anymore. He hid it, protected by many powerful enchantments, in the shack where his ancestors had once lived [...] never guessing that I might one day take the trouble to visit the ruin, or that I might be keeping an eye open for traces of magical concealment. (504)

Dumbledore even further brags—in his own modest way—of his ability to destroy the Horcrux. He tells Harry: "The ring, Harry. Marvolo's ring. And a terrible curse there was upon it too. Had it not been—forgive me the lack of seemly modesty—for my own prodigious skill, and for Professor Snape's timely action when I returned to Hogwarts, desperately injured, I might not have lived to tell the tale" (503). Although we do not see Dumbledore physically destroy the ring, the evidence of its destruction in Dumbledore's hand is clear and present throughout the novel, and Dumbledore is given a chance to explain his part in its destruction and not attribute the credit to anyone else. Hermione is denied these things—the evidence for her heroic act



is given in passing. Hermione's absence is a telling example of the lack of credit Harry associates with her knowledge-bearer role; the fact that he will shade this role with a motherly one rather than a destructive one is poignant.

When she and Ron finally do reunite with Harry, she is overpowered and not allowed to describe or take credit for her moment of triumph. Her most extensive declaration is completely pre-destruction: "'It was Ron, all Ron's idea!' said Hermione breathlessly. 'Wasn't it absolutely brilliant? There we were, after you left, and I said to Ron, even if we find the other one, how are we going to get rid of it? We still hadn't got rid of the cup! And then he thought of it! The basilisk!'" (DH 622). Harry's vision gives us her picture as the negative, unimaginative counterpart, reliant upon oafish Ron to remedy the situation. This is in conflict with other instances of her sudden brilliance, such as figuring out Remus Lupin's secret before the rest of the characters in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (345) or escaping the Death Eaters at Xenophilius Lovegood's house (DH 422). In the latter case, Lovegood attempts to surrender the trio to Voldemort's forces, but Hermione quickly thinks of a way to escape:

"Hold tight," she whispered. "Hold tight . . . any second . . ."

Xenophilius's paper-white face appeared over the top of the sideboard.

"*Obliviate!*" cried Hermione, pointing her wand first into his face, then at the floor beneath them. "*Deprimo!*"

She had blasted a hole in the sitting room floor. They fell like boulders, Harry still holding onto her hand for dear life; there was a scream from below, and he glimpsed two men trying to get out of the way as vast quantities of rubble and broken furniture rained all around them from the shattered ceiling. Hermione twisted in midair and the thundering of the collapsing house rang in Harry's ears as she dragged him once more into darkness. (422-23)

Here we can see an example of Hermione's brilliance in managing to escape the Death Eaters; not only does she hide Ron so that his family is not incriminated, she makes sure Harry is seen so that Lovegood is not punished for bringing the Death Eaters to his home under false pretenses. Her brilliance is here demonstrated on the page, but her Horcrux scene is lacking.

Hermione allows herself to be effectively silenced regarding the cup, which is a different issue from her simply giving credit to others. Hermione allows Ron to describe the events in the Chamber of Secrets:



"So we're another Horcrux down," said Ron, and from under his jacket he pulled the mangled remains of Hufflepuff's cup. "Hermione stabbed it. Thought she should. She hasn't had the pleasure yet."

"Genius!" yelled Harry.

"It was nothing," said Ron, though he looked delighted with himself. "So what's new with you?" (623)

This scene is even more problematic considering Ron appears to have allowed Hermione to destroy the cup, and that he is "delighted with himself" rather than her. This harkens to the notion that he and Harry's innate talent is prioritized in Harry's view over any amount of acquired knowledge Hermione may have from reading books. Hermione cannot act as an isolated knowledge-bearer; such a strong role is either ignored, altered, or misunderstood. Her potential is undercut by Harry's myopic vision, whether or not she is even in the same room as him, and because he is the Chosen One, his point-of-view is the final word.

#### HARRY HAS THE FINAL WORD

Being the narrative blind spot for seven years is an unfortunate place for a character of Hermione's potential; if this blind spot weren't so subtle, if the series were in first-person, it may in fact have emerged as an interesting nuance to the story. As it is, Harry is too close to her to interpret her well, whereas other characters who are further away in this constellation of relationships are spared his critical eye to a degree. Heilman comments that "[o]rdinary people do not realize the extent to which their ideas of gender are culturally created" (231). Harry, a generous and liberal-minded hero, translates Hermione's behavior in this close third-person narrative through the unfortunate lens of the Muggle world, ignoring or misunderstanding the situation. Her magical potential is certainly present in the text, but it tops out and flatlines—even regresses to a certain extent. When Hermione enacts her knowledge-bearer role, Harry's perspective often modifies it with a motherly layer. This is influenced by the mythos he has created around his mother, resulting in a situation in which Hermione can only fail to meet expectations. At other times in the final book, when Hermione acts as knowledge-bearer, the power of that role is undermined by unfortunate language descriptors that weaken her position. Moreover, she is reduced to stereotype when Harry interprets her behavior as hysterical, and is either ignored or made servile when her experiences are discussed at all. If Harry is interpreting the behaviors of those around him according to a male/female binary, then his narrative take, according to Cherland, is that "the first part of this binary is marked as normal, as worthy, as most human. The second part of the binary is less so, on all



counts" (279). And while applying a binary to this is simplistic, it can fairly accurately cover a seventeen-year-old boy's point of departure. Hermione, who is established as a strong and knowledgeable figure early in the series, is ultimately poorly served by Harry's point-of-view.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MELANIE J. CORDOVA is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Binghamton University. In addition to reviewing books for the *Santa Fe Writers Project*, Melanie also serves as Editor in Chief to *Harpur Palate*. Her dissertation is a novel entitled *Black Bear*, and addresses the legacy of the United States's involvement in land grants in northern New Mexico after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.





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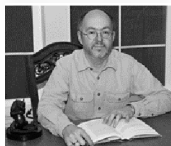


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