Books and cleverness, friendship and bravery: Harry Potter and the deconstruction of traditional representations of gender

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Gender is an important aspect of children’s literature, as it provides a point of reference for readers to understand how their own gender is developed, and the cultural forces that dictate what gender looks like. However, typical representations of gender in children’s literature is often stereotypical, and presents rigid notions of how boys and girls, men and women, are supposed to act, speak, or feel, within themselves and towards each other. The *Harry Potter* series as children’s literature uses these stereotypes to represent fluid notions of gender, providing a hero that is sometimes not typically heroic, and a female protagonist that at times is stronger and braver than her male counterpart. A postmodern view of gender is that an individual does not have to be typecast as masculine or feminine, brave or cowardly, strong or weak; instead, as this analysis of the *Harry Potter* series shows, characters blend ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits in a way that subverts the typical ideals of male and female characters, to ultimately engender new ways of thinking about how to be masculine or feminine. This analysis will draw upon a post-structuralist, feminist viewpoint, using such theoretical work as R.W. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence, the idea of the grotesque female body and its link to subversive humour, and Margery Hourihan’s analysis and reimagining of the heroic quest narrative.
Books and Cleverness, Friendship and Bravery: *Harry Potter* and the Deconstruction of Traditional Representations of Gender

My Honours literature thesis is an exploration of the representation of gender and gender roles in the hugely successful *Harry Potter* series, written between 1997 and 2007 by Joanne Kathleen Rowling. The *Harry Potter* series opens up discussion of a number of cultural discourses, including race, religious belief and class, but this paper will focus on the narrative’s treatment of gender. There has been a great deal of academic critique of the *Harry Potter* series in regards to gender, with two key schools of thought appearing – that the *Harry Potter* series relies upon and reiterates sexist, stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity, and that the series portrays non-typical characters by inverting stereotypical masculine and feminine qualities. The former argument, that the *Harry Potter* series maintains sexist representations of men and women, is put forward by critics such as Jack Zipes, Elizabeth Heilman, and Tison Pugh and David Wallace, and essentially argues that the *Harry Potter* books reinforce social stereotypes of masculinity and femininity through such fantasy narrative tropes as a single masculine hero, a homodiegetic quest narrative, and a lack of powerful or authoritative female characters. The latter argument however, advocated by academics such as Eliza Dresang, Annette Wannamaker and Katrin Berndt, sees the *Harry Potter* novels as more complex than a simple fantasy quest story, and feature both strong women and kind, compassionate men. True, the hero is male and there are more male characters than female, however the characters are not representative of stereotypical men and women as they combine ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits to become more complex and realistic.

I believe that both of these arguments are too simplistic to truly reflect the *Harry Potter* series’ treatment of gender roles and expectations. Throughout this thesis I will argue that a third reading of the narrative can be found, in that the
characters of Harry Potter do not embody either masculine or feminine qualities, and are neither simply sexist nor non-conforming to stereotype. Instead, they blend ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits in a way that subverts the typical ideals of male and female characters, to ultimately engender new ways of thinking about how to be masculine or feminine. To support my position I will be analysing the Harry Potter narrative from a post-structuralist, feminist viewpoint, drawing upon such theoretical work as R.W. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence, the idea of the grotesque female body and its link to subversive humour, Margery Hourihan’s analysis and reimagining of the heroic quest narrative, and Eliza Dresang’s work on the importance of naming within the Harry Potter narrative.

I do not wish to argue that there are no gender stereotypes within the Harry Potter series, because it is very clear that there are. Rowling uses stereotypical characteristics such as the male hero, the female helper and the hero’s sidekick, to undermine them, and to show how men and women can be restrained by cultural expectations of gender. Rowling’s principal characters however have been written in subversive ways as they suggest different ideas about the hero, heroine, and the sidekick, among others. The construction of both female and male characters of the Harry Potter series includes contemporary gender patterns, but is not restricted by them. The series instead mocks gender clichés in a satirising, but never degrading, way. Rowling’s narrative and her characters work together to suggest different modes of femininity and masculinity, and to show that fluidity is allowed in gender discourse, that there is not just one way of being male or female. The characters of Harry Potter are not simple representations of masculinity and femininity, though at first glance they may appear to be. Instead these characters embody both masculine and feminine characteristics that work to transgress dominant notions of masculinity and femininity in children’s literature. By creating characters this way, Rowling is challenging traditional gender expectations, such as that of the passive, weak female helper, or the strong, unconquerable male hero. It is important to note too, that the development of the characters’ embodiment of gender discourse cannot be separated from their physical and emotional development. That is, the subversion of traditional gender discourse grows as the characters do, from the first book where the characters are ten and eleven, until the seventh, where they have come of age at
seventeen. Arguably, the characters within the series that do portray hypermasculine or feminine characteristics, those that stay within the narrow parameters of what constitutes male and female, are characters that are unlikeable, or silly.

The current criticism on both sides of the argument seems to rely on stereotypical notions of gender in order to either point out sexism or to argue for the subversion of sexist implications, and I think this proves problematic. In order to draw out different notions of gender from the Harry Potter series it is important to set aside these culturally acceptable ideals of what constitutes male and female, masculine and feminine. Subversion of stereotypical gender roles cannot be found by simply inverting the typical expectations of masculinity and femininity, because inversion still suggests a male/female binary, still requires an abjection and Othering of one gender over the other. Hermione Granger is the key female character that embodies this notion of a new femininity. Her characterisation is not restrained by traditional expectations of femininity such as passive acceptance of what she is told by people in authority, or by a lack of a powerful presence, both in terms of her physical appearance and her magical knowledge. Male characters such as Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom likewise have been created in such a way that they embody fluid representations of masculinity; they are not just athletic and brave heroes, nor are they just passive and weak sidekicks. These characters suggest new masculinities as they feature characteristics typically associated with both masculinity and femininity. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence is interesting to consider here, as the notion that hegemonic masculinity and male privilege works as symbolic dominance (Bourdieu, 1998). Bourdieu states that the established order is easily perpetuated and that those culturally acceptable ideals of gender misrecognise the division between male and female as “simultaneously arbitrary, contingent, and also socio-logically necessary” (1998:2). The ‘symbols’ of dominance relate to the cultural expectations that are considered inherently true about gender, and these expectations then become stereotype.

The combination of masculine and feminine behaviours makes these principal characters more relatable to intended readers, because they do not allow themselves to be typecast as hyper-masculine or effeminate men, or passive, silly women. By using Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony as a new theory of authorial voice (1981), there is polyphony of masculine and feminine voices within the narrative that
creates a dialogue between the characters and the intended child reader. Ultimately, the reader is able to choose which voice relates closest to his or her own. Peter Hollindale theorises that there are three levels of ideology inherent in children’s literature: the surface level, the implicit level, and the cultural discourse of the intended child reader (Hollindale, 1991). The surface level refers to the particular ideologies or beliefs that one may take from a simple reading of a text, and the implicit level refers to the inherent ideologies or beliefs of the author that may or may not be apparent in the same text. Most importantly, Hollindale argues, the third dimension of ideology within children’s literature refers to how cultural discourse, developments in literary theory, and the notion of the intended child reader can work together to respond to a text (Hollindale, 1991). This is important in terms of the notion of gender representation, because the narrative and its characters subtly challenge the cultural discourse surrounding ideas of masculinity, in order to define what the intended child reader will take from a text.

Harry Potter is the hero of this particular fantasy quest narrative, and the series is told from a homodiegetic perspective; that is, readers experience the world, the other characters and the events that take place from Harry’s perspective. This is a typical trope of the fantasy quest narrative, and one particularly relevant for children’s literature. There are many related aspects of the fantasy quest genre that deal specifically with the hero character, and these too are related to gender. Margery Hourihan examines the typical notions of the hero in fantasy literature, and discusses how popular narratives often rely on these notions of the hero to inscribe male/female dualism, asserting the male as the norm, and the ‘important’ character, while defining the female as Other (Hourihan, 1997). This could be true about Harry Potter and the same-titled narrative, as the heroic protagonist is male, and at first glance fits the mould of the typical hero. However the narrative as a whole does feature irregular male and female characters in different positions of power and authority. Despite the homodiegetic perspective, the development of the principal characters from childhood to adolescence allows for the deconstruction of traditional masculinity and femininity, and creates instead multiple gender voices. It is these traditional ideals of the masculine hero that I wish to discuss here, so as to show how the narrative draws upon these ideals, not to rely and maintain them, but to suggest different ways of being masculine. In line with Bourdieu’s theory, it is
necessary to show that the binary between masculine and feminine is not natural and arbitrary. Rowling’s characters allow for a removal or move away from typical male/female binaries, and the idea that to be a strong female one must be as much like men as possible, or to be a kind, sensitive male hero one must renounce all qualities, like athleticism, that make him ‘masculine’.

Theoretical Background

As mentioned previously, the main theoretical viewpoint I will take within this analysis is a post-structuralist, feminist one, and I will draw upon various theories regarding gender and gender performance, and the subversion of inherent binaries found within literature, as well as the genre of children’s literature and its related tropes. At its essential core, post-structuralism aims to reject the idea of an inherent, underlying structure upon which meaning in texts must rest. This is in contrast to ‘structuralism’, which explains how the way we conceptualise the world is dependent on the language and culture we use and inhabit (Storey, 1997). According to structuralists, meaning within texts and the world around us is fixed, based on that culture and its particular tropes and beliefs. From a post-structuralist point of view, meaning is not fixed but fluid, and is always in progress (Storey, 92). This is the point of this thesis, to dismantle the idea that certain narrative and character tropes only have one meaning. The male/female binary thought to be natural within children’s literature will be the main focus of this analysis, though the genre and narrative structure of the Harry Potter series allows for a greater analysis of the typical hero archetype, which I will look at alongside the gender question.

Children’s literature is a genre that involves many typical literary tropes that relate to the characters, the narrative structure, and the language. Part of the pleasure in reading books like the Harry Potter series stems from the expectation that readers have of the texts, such as certain characters, events, and the happy ending that invariably eventuates (Heilman, 2009). The exploration of gender discourse within children’s literature is equally important, because the representation of gendered bodies and behaviours has significant impact on the intended child reader (Flanagan, 2010; Heilman, 2006; Stephens, 2002). As the study of children’s
literature became more popular with academics during the late twentieth century, the process of undermining stereotypical gender discourse within children's literature became more important, and the acknowledgement that gender and gendered behaviour is a social construct more apparent (Flanagan 2010). As many theorists (Hourihan, 1997; Flanagan, 2010; Berndt, 2006) argue, simply inverting gender stereotypes does not mean the dismantling of them. That is, powerful female characters contrasted with passive males does not mean the disruption of the stereotype of gendered behaviour; there is still an apparent binary, a “violent hierarchy” (Derrida, 1981) between the two: “the process of ‘undoing’ the textual construction of masculinity and femininity as inherently oppositional concepts requires more than simply altering the schemata of behavioural attributes typically associated with each category of gender” (Flanagan 2010:26). This process of undoing patriarchal, heteronormative gender expectations within literature is very much an ongoing one, as authors of children’s and young adult literature embrace feminist principles to promote feminist agency, gay and lesbian theories to promote different sexualities, and masculinity studies to offer up non-hegemonic ideals of how to be a man (Flanagan, 2010). My research seeks to expand this process of undoing patriarchal expectations by examining the transgression of male/female binaries.

The Harry Potter series does encapsulate many of the traditional genre and gender patterns that children’s literature encompasses, and some critics have condemned this, claiming that the novels portray stereotypical characters that may be dangerous to child readers that do not ‘fit’ to these stereotypes (Heilman, 2009; Pugh and Wallace, 2006). This kind of criticism however relies on these negative stereotypes, and thus reinforces them, as well as draws into question the idea of the ‘intended child reader’, and what that reader needs or wants from a text. The typical character archetypes involved in children’s literature are inherently linked to cultural notions of gender and the relationship between the male and female characters. My argument is that by dismantling typical notions of gender through the use of traditional children’s literature tropes and archetypes, as well as a homodiegetic narrative, Rowling’s Harry Potter series provides a multiplicity of gender positions for intended child readers to become acquainted with.
Golden-Haired Brides and Dark, Dangerous Beauties

Most of the current research regarding gender discourse within the Harry Potter series focuses on femininity and the role that female characters play within the narrative. The basic definition of gender that I will base this critique on is that of gender as the social and cultural production and reproduction of female and male identities and behaviours, separate from the biological differences between men and women (Flanagan, 2010). As I mentioned previously, the current criticism of the Harry Potter narrative and its use of gender is split into two key debates: that the series presents sexist representations of femininity by relying on stock standard, stereotypical female characters; or that it subverts stereotype by presenting strong, independent women who put aside those aspects of their character that make them feminine. Instead the Harry Potter series provides representations of emerging gender identities by introducing different feminine and masculine dialogues.

According to Katrin Berndt (2011), youth culture has often been a site for feminist struggle against gender stereotypes, as the push against patriarchal notions of femininity has gained momentum. Many academics argue that contemporary children’s literature relies on typical cultural notions of gender as readers find pleasure in the familiar (Heilman, 2009; Hourihan, 1997). The gentle but passive supporter of the hero; the mother of the hero, who cares for and protects the hero from her position in the domestic sphere; the “golden-haired brides” who love the hero, are all benevolent female archetypes that are prevalent within children’s fantasy literature. On the other side of the spectrum are the women who present a threat to the hero: they are the ugly, malicious stepmothers, or the dark, dangerous beauties who are threatening because of their sexuality (Hourihan, 1997). The Harry Potter series certainly features many of these character archetypes. Molly Weasley, the typical ‘mother’ character, is really only seen in the domestic sphere, and does not have a lot to do with the outside world throughout the narrative. Narcissa Malfoy is another mother who does not work, and whose only real focus is the wellbeing of her son, Draco. Bellatrix Lestrange is the “dark, dangerous” woman of the Harry Potter series, a threat to the hero. Hermione Granger is one of Harry’s best friends, and is seen by many critics as the helper of the two boys, Harry and Ron, an enabler of the boys’ adventures rather than an adventurer in her own right.
While there are many hero stories that contemporary audiences recognise that feature masculine heroes and inscribe patriarchal dominance over these female character archetypes, the *Harry Potter* narrative blends the archetypal character tropes to create characters that portray fluid representations of gender, and new ways of thinking about and performing femininity. Hourihan (1997) argues that earlier hero myths featured powerful women that appeared in the hero’s journey whenever they wanted, to save the hero rather than simply support him, and *Harry Potter* is reminiscent of this earlier tradition. Going back to the role of mothers within the fantasy quest tradition, it is interesting to look at Molly Weasley and Narcissa Malfoy in a little more detail. While it is true that both Molly and Narcissa exist mostly in a domestic role, they are arguably the authority figures in their respective families. Molly disciplines her children more so than her husband Arthur does, and Narcissa wields a great deal of authority over Draco and Lucius, her son and husband respectively, as seen in *The Deathly Hallows*. As well, both of these women will do anything they need to do in order to protect their children, and this should not be seen as a necessarily negative stereotype. In the *Deathly Hallows*, both Molly and Narcissa use their own strengths to protect their families. Molly enters the final battle of Hogwarts and fights and kills Bellatrix Lestrange, exhibiting a physical strength and magical power that readers have not before seen. Narcissa lies to Voldemort, an act that has constantly been lauded as almost impossible throughout the series, when she tells him that Harry is indeed dead so that they can re-enter Hogwarts castle and find Draco. At this point of the narrative, Narcissa does not care if Voldemort wins or loses; she simply wants to take her family out of harm’s way. This links back to Hourihan’s assertion that earlier female characters of fantasy literature featured women that were descendants of the great mother goddess who supported the hero along his journey (Hourihan, 1997). There are other characters within the narrative that invoke the traditional character archetypes while at the same time subverting them by suggesting new ways of constructing and performing femininity. The most important character to do so is that of Hermione Granger, and I will explore her role in the series as a subverting force by comparing her to those female characters that do embody repressive, stereotypical notions of femininity.
Hermione Granger is one character that has generated a lot of discussion regarding her place within the Harry Potter series, and what that means regarding stereotypical gender discourse. She has been praised, with some scholars arguing that she is an acceptable role model for female readers because of her intelligence and strength, and she has also been criticised, as others believe that she uses this intelligence only for the satisfaction of her male counterparts, and not for herself. Hermione Granger is a character that represents gender fluidity as she challenges the stereotypical notion of what it means to be female in a man’s world. She is strong, smart, and brave, but she is also in touch with her emotions and readily displays them; she’s gentle and kind.

The importance of names within the Harry Potter series is discussed in detail by a number of critics (Dresang, 2009; Hopkins 2009), and Dresang explores the literary heritage of the name Hermione in her article ‘Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender’ (2009). Hermione the ancient goddess, Shakespeare’s Hermione in A Winter’s Tale, Hermione the Saint and contemporary Hermiones found in the work of D.H. Lawrence and H.D are mythological and literary characters that Rowling draws upon to create her Hermione, and to make her a strong, powerful character (Dresang, 2009). An exploration of the links between other Hermiones allows for an in-depth analysis of Rowling’s Hermione. Both the mythical and the Shakespearean Hermiones were at the mercy of the men in their lives, and yet they were able to use their positions to seek their due (Dresang, 2009). The intertextual links between the Hermione of myth and Rowling’s Hermione also links back to Hourihan’s assertion that earlier hero myths featured women as descendants of the great goddess (Hourihan, 1997). While the narrative places Hermione in a secondary position to Harry, she is still able to find her own voice, and to control her destiny. It is important to highlight that she does this while supporting Harry; she does not have to set aside her personal growth in order to help the hero, or vice versa.

The ‘troll in the bathroom’ scene may be one of the most discussed and dissected scenes of Philosopher’s Stone in regards to Hermione, her place within the
narrative, and the role that gender has in the narrative. Critics and scholars on the side of the *Harry Potter* series alike have looked at this one event in great detail, in order to determine the notion of gender stereotype and the impact this may have on the intended audience. In brief, in chapter ten at the Halloween feast, a troll is discovered to have broken into the castle. As the students are taken back to their common rooms and the Professors gather to discuss what is to be done, Harry and Ron head off to find Hermione, who has been locked in the girl’s bathroom all evening because she had earlier overheard Ron saying nasty things about her, and is unaware of the troll’s presence. The two, thinking that they are helping in getting rid of the troll, lock it into a chamber that they soon realise is the same bathroom. Ron and Harry rush in to fight the troll and to help Hermione, and they find her shrinking against the wall opposite, looking as if she was about to faint. The troll was advancing on her, knocking the sinks off the walls as it went…She couldn’t move, she was still flat against the wall, her mouth open with terror (*PS*, 129-130).

Critics such as Elizabeth Heilman disparage this scene as to them it suggests that Hermione needs to be rescued by the boys, painting her as the quintessential damsel in distress (Heilman, 139). Scenes like this, Heilman argues, along with the lack of powerful females, “were disappointing…The books feature females in secondary positions of power and authority and replicated some of the most familiar cultural stereotypes for both males and females” (Heilman, 2009:139). The critics’ quick dismissal of the fight with the troll and Hermione’s place in it is problematic, because it does not take into account that Hermione is eleven years old and Muggleborn, meaning she is new to the world where creatures such as trolls exist. As well, Hermione was not warned that there was a troll wandering the castle, and I imagine would not have expected it to find its way into her bathroom. Heilman’s argument that Hermione’s fear is representative of her damsel in distress role relies on this notion that for women to appear strong and active, ‘proper feminists’, they must not show fear or hesitation. However this argument is too simplistic, and relies upon the stereotypical notions of femininity that Heilman is trying to argue against. It brings into question the idea of dualism, and that belief that for women to be taken
seriously, they need to act as much like men as possible (Hourihan, 1997; Berndt, 2011).

In her article ‘Hermione in the Bathroom: The Gothic, Menarche, and Female Development in the Harry Potter series’, June Cummins argues that Rowling draws upon the Gothic literary tradition to say something different about female development, and the female position as Other. Cummins points to the scene with the troll specifically to highlight the Gothic elements within *Harry Potter* as the “disgusting, secreting troll” (2008:183) represents the grotesque aspects of femininity. The troll serves not only to horrify Hermione, but to assist her in not becoming monstrous herself. As Hermione is positioned as the damsel in distress in this scene, where she is ‘rescued’ by Harry and Ron, the troll acts as a catalyst for change. Cummins argues that even though Hermione becomes alienated from the controlling, strong person she had been previously when she is confronted, and ultimately beaten, by the troll, she does not stay this way. As the troll represents the grotesque female body, the part of Hermione that has to be cast off, that is, her passivity and her fear, she “emerges triumphant, not as a passive, immobile victim” (Cummins, 2008:187). Hermione does not lose her self-confidence, bossiness or intelligence, in fact these traits only become stronger as she grows older. Hermione slips into the Gothic mode when she reaches puberty/becomes a woman, and ultimately exits that mode to “become a much more dynamic and genre-busting character” (Cummins, 2008:190). Hermione subverts the ‘damsel in distress’ role by lying to Professor McGonagall and taking responsibility for the boys’ actions with the troll, as the damsel in distress never saves her rescuer in return (Limbach, 2007).

The grotesque body links into Bakhtin’s ideas of the carnivalesque, and of the subversive nature of the Other. Carnivalesque refers to the power of traditional language and spectacle associated with folk culture, language and images that represent the universal truths of life, death and renewal through the grotesque body (Bakhtin 1984, cited by Hall, 2010). The power of the grotesque lies in its potential for laughter and humour, as it allows the Other to be humorous and subversive, rather than rejected by society: “the carnivalesque and grotesque in *Harry Potter* illustrates an appeal to social transformation through the power of laughter and the reversal of the dominant order” (Hall, 2010:1). The troll is meant to appear humorous as well as frightening. It is dull and dim-witted as it “lumbered around, blinking
stupidly” (PS, 129). The troll’s power comes from its large, grotesque appearance, rather than any intelligence or magical ability. Much like the Hermione that entered the bathroom, the troll does not know how to act in this new environment. Part of Hermione’s unlikeable nature up until this point stems from the fact that she does not know how to use her superior intelligence and knowledge, other than showing off (Dresang, 2002). If the troll is a horrifying embodiment of the grotesque female body, then it is a subversive one, as it allows for Hermione to become something different, as she exits the bathroom and begins to change her behaviour to better suit her environment. This is not to say that she loses her voice, because in fact her voice only develops and becomes louder as she grows into it. As Dresang claims, the character of Hermione becomes a caricature, rather than a stereotype. A caricature is a representation in literature that implies an exaggeration of the characteristics of features of a subject; that is, not real life but an exaggeration of real life. A stereotype on the other hand is something that conforms to a fixed or general pattern that represents an oversimplified opinion or an uncritical judgement that is held in common by a group or groups of people (Dresang, 2002). Hermione avoids becoming a stereotype because she learns how to apply her knowledge in a reasonable and appropriate way, and that knowledge becomes an important asset. As the characters mature, Hermione’s knowledge and intelligence allows her to receive praise and acceptance from her peers rather than being teased for it.

As the narrative progresses, Hermione frequently uses her intelligence and strength throughout to aid Harry and Ron. In chapter eleven of Philosopher’s Stone, when Harry is playing Quidditch and his broomstick starts trying to buck him off, it is Hermione who uses magic to set fire to Snape’s robes, thinking that he is the one cursing Harry. Readers know by the end of the book that it was Professor Quirrell who was attempting to kill Harry, but the fact remains that Hermione is the hero in this scene (PS, 140). As well, in chapter sixteen when Harry, Hermione and Ron have gone through the trapdoor to save the philosopher’s stone from Voldemort, Hermione is the one who knows she can answer the riddle that will allow Harry to continue on to face him, and her to go back to get help.

“Brilliant,” said Hermione. “This isn’t magic – it’s logic – a puzzle. A lot of the greatest wizards haven’t got an ounce of logic, they’d be stuck in here for ever.”
“But so will we, won’t we?”

“Of course not,” said Hermione. “Everything we need is here on this paper. Seven bottles: three are poison; two are wine; one will get us safely through the black fire and one will get us back through the purple.”

“But how do we know which to drink?”

“Give me a minute.” (PS, 207)

Here, it is Harry who is doubtful of their abilities to overcome the obstacle put before them, and only Hermione’s self-assurance that she can answer the riddle that gives him the right answer. Again, critics such as Heilman see this as an example of the ‘helper’ role that Hermione plays within the narrative, arguing that she only uses her intelligence, logic, and talents to help Harry and to further his ambition rather than her own: “Hermione’s advanced knowledge of magic shows potential beyond the other students, but she has only exercised her gift to aid Harry’s quests rather than focusing on her own career” (Heilman, 2009:145). Hourihan argues that the women found in modern heroic narratives are not characters, but “symbols of events in the hero’s psyche” (1997:156). They appear in the narrative when they are directly involved in the hero’s quest, because these heroic narratives are told from the hero’s perspective. On a superficial level, this appears to be true; the narrative does not explicitly develop Hermione’s consciousness and self-identity, but to be fair we should not expect it to. The Harry Potter series is, after all, a heroic quest narrative. It is homodiegetic; it follows Harry’s point of view because he is the hero of the story. The narrative tropes associated with the fantasy quest cannot be removed here simply for the sake of feminism, and critics like Heilman seem to think that they should. Glenna Andrade sees Hermione as a character reminiscent of the female sleuth in the Nancy Drew tradition, who takes up the sleuth role as the independent young female whose curiosity and intelligence allows her to take action, even when the emphasis on the male adventure may inhibit her agency (Andrade, 2008). Rowling blends genre in the development of Hermione’s character, and this is important as she is attempting to create a character that is not constrained by cultural expectations. This kind of critical analysis of the stereotypical representation of gender cited by critics like Heilman relies upon stereotypical notions of gender. That is, Heilman is leaning on the notion that women act as the supporters of men,
the enablers of adventures, rather than adventurers in their own right. By simply helping Harry, one of her best friends, Hermione is made a weak, passive girl who only cares about her friend’s fate. However this should not make her a weak character. Her wanting to help her friends, her kindness and compassion, coupled with her intelligence, should be seen as an example of her rounded character, and the fluid way in which she deals with gender and gender performance. She should not have to compromise her ‘softer’ qualities in order to be seen as a powerful witch, and indeed a woman.

Hourihan (1997) and Berndt (2011) explore the idea of the subversion of stereotype within children’s and young adult fiction, and conclude that true subversion cannot be found by simply “flipping” gender roles, with powerful women and weak men. Hourihan argues that “the problem with dualism is that if you simply turn it on its head it is still a dualism. Inversion is not the same as subversion” (Hourihan, 1997:205). This theory of inversion versus subversion is reminiscent of the work of Jacques Derrida and his theory of ‘deconstruction’. Derrida argued that deconstruction is the attempt to expose and undermine the oppositions, hierarchies and paradoxes inherent in literature. These oppositions are not peaceful; instead they are created in such a way as to provide a “violent hierarchy”, where one dominates the other (Derrida, 1981:41). Simply reversing binary oppositions found in texts would be to keep in place the assumptions that already exist in these binaries, and in order to truly deconstruct these oppositions, it is necessary to create a new concept. Derrida was not referring specifically to gender; he refers to many different binaries that exist within literature and philosophy, but I am applying his theory of deconstruction here to argue that the Harry Potter narrative is attempting to do just this. By making Hermione an emotionless, sombre young woman who fights others with her intelligence and magical prowess would be to infer that to be a strong woman, she must act as much like the men as possible. Instead, Hermione combines her strength and her emotions, her kindness and her bravery, to become a fluid, believable character. A typical assumption made about the binaries between female and male, masculine and feminine is that they are static and unchanging, when in fact they are not (Moi, 1997). If we go back to the poststructuralist idea that meaning is fluid and always in progress, depending on the different positions of culture, then the binaries between male and female are also always changing.
depending on the culture around us. According to Julia Kristeva femininity is a position, and is not fixed. To posit all women as necessarily feminine and all men as necessarily masculine is what enables the patriarchy to determine women as Other (Kristeva, cited by Moi, 1997). To truly achieve deconstruction, then, the definitions of femininity and masculinity need to be renegotiated, to make room for fluidity and human experience rather than specific cultural expectations (Kristeva, cited by Moi, 1997). Dresang draws upon this idea in her discussion of ‘post-modern feminism’, which sees the Other position of women as enabling rather than entrapping, because it allows for change and difference (Dresang, 2002). There is no one best way for a woman to be, and to suggest otherwise is to perpetuate the idea that a woman can be a good or bad feminist.

The physical representation of the female characters within the Harry Potter series is another aspect of the narrative that is discussed by academics in regards to gender stereotype, and definitely more so than the male characters which is interesting. According to critics such as Heilman (2009) and Mayes-Elma (2009), the girls are all obsessed with their bodies and physical appearance, while the physicality of the male characters is not so important. Hourihan argues that the physical appearance of the female characters is linked to their position in the narrative: the “beautiful and blonde” characters are generally benevolent, whereas the “dark beauties” are evil, deceptive and dangerous – “La Belle Dame Sans Merci in one of her guises” (Hourihan, 1997:156). This is a dangerous stereotype, and one that definitely perpetuates the importance of the outward appearance of the female characters, in contrast to the male characters who are not categorised so heavily based on physicality. The Harry Potter novels though do not focus a great deal of attention on the physical appearance of the characters, except for very basic descriptions of them. Hermione is first introduced to the reader as a girl with large teeth, very “bushy hair and a bossy sort of voice” (PS). These three aspects of her personality, her large teeth, her bushy hair and her bossy voice, are aspects I will explore further on, and they still link to important aspects of her personality. Moving away from Hourihan’s argument that these physical representations are negative however, I believe that these particular aspects allow for a more complex reading of Hermione’s character and her place within the narrative.
Hermione’s ‘transformation’ from the bookish bore to the beautiful date of a sports star in *Goblet of Fire* is just one example from the narrative that has drawn discussion from academics on both sides of the argument:

But she didn’t look like Hermione at all. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy, but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes made of a floaty, periwinkle-blue material, and she was holding herself differently, somehow – or maybe it was merely the absence of the twenty or so books she usually had slung over her back. She was also smiling – rather nervously, it was true – but the reduction in the size of her front teeth was more noticeable than ever. Harry couldn’t understand how he hadn’t spotted it before (*GoF*, 360).

Heilman argues that “the message to girls is: get a makeover. You are not okay” (Heilman, 152). Marion Rana in her book *Creating Magical Worlds: Otherness and Othering in Harry Potter*, agrees with this assessment of Hermione’s ‘makeover’. She argues that Hermione forgoes her individualism and bookish nature to be accepted by the status quo, the “dominating view of the female in order to be liked and integrated…via male attention and the approval of a high-status insider, Viktor Krum” (Rana, 82). For critics like Heilman and Rana, Hermione’s decision to change her hair and her posture and her teeth is the ultimate feminist sin – she changes her appearance in order to ‘fit in’. What these critics ignore, however, is the fact that it is a formal event – everybody is dressed up. They call into question again a seemingly radical feminist notion that for a woman to truly be independent, strong and active she must not have a desire to fit in. She must not want to look pretty, or feminine, even if for just one night – a night where she is expected to look a certain way. Readers know that the next day Hermione tells Harry that “she had used liberal amounts of Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion on it for the ball, but ‘it’s way too much bother to do every day’” (*GoF*, 377). In the ‘normal’ world, in her everyday life, Hermione does not bother a great deal about her appearance, nor does she allow it to be an issue for her. The Yule Ball is the first major example of Hermione’s physical appearance having an effect on how others see her, but it does not change how she thinks and feels about herself: “her new appearance seems to be more noteworthy to everyone else than it is to her…By changing her appearance with ease and inciting such reactions, Hermione demonstrates that the emphasis on physical beauty is absurd”
(Limbach, 2007:22). She remains independent, strong, and active, and she should not be deemed as anything other than this simply because she wanted to look pretty and formal for one night of the year. Her intelligence again comes in to play with her relationship with Krum, as it was the very reason he wanted to ask her to the ball in the first place, after always seeing her in the library (GoF, 367). According to Limbach (2007), the “nerdy girl” transformation into a beauty queen is a pervasive theme however Hermione does not fall into this trap, as her intelligence and independence only develop further.

Hermione’s hair and teeth, the two main aspects of her physical appearance that is discussed by the critics, are also symbolic of important elements of her personality, elements that highlight how she is representative of a character not restrained by cultural expectations of femininity. Her hair, usually bushy and out of control, is a distinct contrast to her prissy, somewhat narrow-minded nature, and suggests her own kind of recklessness (Berndt, 2011). When Hermione allows the nurse Madam Pomfrey to magically straighten her teeth after a run-in with resident bully Draco Malfoy, it shows a mischievous side to her character, rather than one who simply wants to have straight teeth because it is desirable:

“Hermione,” said Ron, looking sideways at her, suddenly frowning, “your teeth…”

…

“No, I mean, they’re different to how they were before he put the hex on you…they’re all…straight and – and normal sized.”

Hermione suddenly smiled very mischievously, and Harry noticed it too: it was a very different smile to the one he remembered (GoF, 352).

Despite her parents’ wishes that she continue using braces to straighten her teeth, Hermione allowed Madam Pomfrey, the nurse, to shrink her teeth a little more than they were originally. Here she is exhibiting her own agency, rather than adhering to the wishes of her parents’. While radical-cultural feminists would disapprove of using the body in this way to attract attention (Dresang, 2002), Hermione is not looking for anybody’s approval or attention. Hermione’s appearance has never been an issue for her or for the others around her before this moment. The physical development of the characters is inextricably linked to the development of the gender issue, because
as the characters grow and mature their understanding of how to be male and female develops as well. This book is the first in the series where Harry, Ron and Hermione all seem to start to notice each other, and others around them, as young men and women, rather than as childhood friends, and this is important, because it is the beginning of their maturity into self-aware adults.

Hermione’s development into a young woman throughout the series is even more interesting in terms of body image and gender because despite the homodiegetic narrative she develops away from the male gaze. The narrative is told from Harry’s point of view, this as I’ve already pointed out is a simple fantasy genre trope. As a result, the development of characters like Hermione and even Ron outside of their interactions with Harry is limited. This is not an aspect of the narrative that I want to deny, because it is apparent, and I think it is important. Critics like Dresang (2002) and Heilman (2009) argue that this is an example of the text that calls into question the feminist nature of the story, but Katrin Berndt (2011) makes an interesting argument when she claims that despite the male point of view of the text, Hermione’s development does take place outside of the typical male gaze. Since Harry does not have romantic or sexual feelings for her, Hermione is never described in terms of a sexual object (Berndt, 2011). As is suggested by the earlier example from *Goblet of Fire*, Harry does not see her as asexual, either, which I think it just as important. Harry begins to register that Hermione is growing into a strong, beautiful young woman, even if he has no romantic intentions towards her. Because of the narrative point of view, readers then start to notice Hermione as a young woman, rather than a girl. Despite the critics’ dismissal of Hermione’s growing interest in her body and her appearance, I think this is a credible reflection of the maturity and growth that young men and women undergo, and as such this makes Hermione a credible character in terms of a role model. She does not allow her physical appearance to stop her doing what she needs to do, whether that be carry around “twenty or so” books for her classes, or fight against the Death Eaters, which she does just as well as the boys do as the narrative progresses.

Hermione’s language and dialogue is another aspect of her characterisation that is criticised by scholars like Heilman, Dresang and Rana. While the boys are often described as “shouting” or “yelling”, Hermione “shrieks” and “screams”. She is also quick to tears – Hermione had locked herself in the bathroom in the first place
because she overheard Ron say to Harry that she is “a nightmare…She must’ve noticed she’s got no friends” (PS, 127). Heilman (2009) argues that this is an example of the books reinforcing the negative portrayal of female characters as passive, gossipy, and less important than the male characters. Dresang agrees on this point, and argues that by describing Hermione’s voice this way, Rowling is doing disservice to the strong, independent character that she is attempting to make Hermione out to be. Instead of a caricature, Hermione has become a stereotype of young females (Dresang, 2002). However I see Rowling’s use of this stereotypical, gender-specific language as a means to reflect the position that women are placed in by patriarchy, especially when they are younger. As Hermione grows older, the references to ‘shrieking’, ‘screaming’ and crying becomes less apparent, suggesting that Hermione grows stronger and more articulated, rather than retreating into a repressed position. Hermione’s emotional responses are important in portraying her as a well-rounded character, one who challenges the male/female dichotomy and the idea that strong, powerful women aren’t allowed to show emotion. Berndt argues that Hermione’s emotions and her ‘softer’ qualities, coupled with her intelligence and magical prowess make her a believable, fluid character, one that offers a different way to be feminine. Berndt states

therefore, her depiction as somebody who often responds in a shrill voice, who is susceptible to tears and who has got a sharp mind as well as a sharp temper, is not essentially altered in the course of her maturity progress. All of those attributes underline Hermione’s intensity towards life (2011:166).

The notion of female voice is an important one in regards to Hermione and the other female characters within the Harry Potter series. Hourihan (1997) and Berndt (2011) have argued that as girls get older and become women, they lose their sense of self-determination and their individual voice, as they attempt to fit themselves into the cultural mould of what womanhood and femininity must look like. There are female characters within the Harry Potter series that do this – characters like Lavender Brown, Pansy Parkinson, and the ghost Moaning Myrtle all embody cultural stereotypes of womanhood. However, they have been painted this way to suggest what happens to girls when they allow themselves to be restricted by these stereotypes. Hermione does not allow herself to become restricted by stereotypes of
womanhood. Her voice and agency, her self-determination and approval of herself allows her to become a character very much free from the dichotomy of masculine or feminine.

**Silly Witches**

The female characters that do adhere to stereotype are characters that are stagnant and silly, and suggest to readers what happens when girls allow themselves to be constrained by the narrow parameters of culturally acceptable femininity. One criticism that Elizabeth Heilman has of the representation of the female characters within the *Harry Potter* novels is that aside from the main female characters of Hermione, Ginny and Luna, the girls are presented to readers in groups, rather than as individuals. Alicia Spinnet, Angelina Johnson, and Katie Bell, the three girls who play on the Gryffindor Quidditch team in the first four books, as well as Parvarti Patil and Lavender Brown, are two ‘groups’ of girls that readers are introduced to as peers of Harry. Heilman is critical of this ‘grouping’ of female characters and goes on to argue that these girls are also all presented as “giggly, emotional, gossipy, and anti-intellectual” (Heilman, 2009:150). Heilman argues that the repeated grouping of female characters reinforces a tendency for readers to interpret females as types, rather than as individuals. I think that Heilman does have a point here – the characters mentioned above, specifically Lavender Brown and Parvarti Patil, are ‘hazy’ characters, and as readers we know very little about them, and they are introduced to us in pairs or groups. However I believe this relates again to the idea of inversion, and how simple inversion of character tropes does not allow for subversion of stereotype. It also suggests a link to Bakhtin’s polyphony, as the authorial voice is presenting different ideas of femininity by showcasing a range of female voices (Bakhtin, 1981). Dresang takes a post-modern stance in regards to these female characters that have been marginalised, as she argues that this is not necessarily a negative aspect of the narrative. Instead, she sees the Other position of these girls as “an opportunity to observe whether or how females may find strength and agency despite their marginalization” (Dresang, 2002:218). Rowling positions girls like Lavender Brown in the ‘silly’ role to suggest what can happen to
girls when they allow themselves to remain in the narrow frame of what constitutes femininity, and how to be a girl. There is a girl character that truly embodies the danger of remaining stagnant in typical notions of gender, and that is Moaning Myrtle, the ghost who has taken up residence in the girl’s bathroom. Cummins suggests that the character of Myrtle is a “carnivalesque, grotesque joke of a girl – who stays in the bathroom, endlessly examining her pimples and incessantly getting her period. Myrtle, as a ghost, is the bodiless embodiment of the abject of female adolescence” (Cummins, 2008:187-188). In the Gothic tradition, the female character must face something monstrous to avoid becoming monstrous herself. Hermione leaves the Gothic tradition when she becomes a dynamic female character, a strong female heroine, but Myrtle is stuck in the bathroom, and thus stuck in the stereotype of the adolescent girl, one who will never escape the limiting space of female adolescence.

Hermione is not a character that is restricted by cultural expectations of femininity. Her voice and agency, her self-determination and acceptance of herself allows her to become a character very much free from the dichotomy of masculine or feminine. While the female characters may initially appear as disempowered and incapable of standing alone, as time progresses they are exposed to societal problems, and as a result begin to represent states of empowerment.

**The Heroes and the Wild Things**

Current research regarding notions of gender within the *Harry Potter* series focuses a great deal on femininity and the female characters, while neglecting the male characters, and ideas about masculinity. In the research that there is, though, there are two key strains of thought regarding the *Harry Potter* series’ treatment of masculinity. One is that the series represents and maintains heteronormative notions of masculinity and how to be an acceptable man, and the other is that it suggests subversion from heteronormativity by presenting effeminated male characters. My research challenges this dichotomy because each key argument relies on stereotypical notions of masculinity to argue either that the narrative sustains heteronormativity or subverts it. Again, Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence is an
interesting link here, as masculinity is positioned as imprisoned by heteronormative ideals; that is, it is not simply a matter of domination and suppression of feminine power but a denial of the effect the social order exerts on both women and men. My analysis of Rowling’s Potter series seeks to reconceptualise how gender representations can be fluid, rather than stagnant and stereotypical.

The move away from hegemonic masculinity within children’s literature is an important one in terms of the dismantling of typical gendered behaviour, because most of the critique of gender has focused on femininity and the female body (Heilman, 2009; Dresang, 2002; Berndt, 2011). This is somewhat inevitable, because the dominant construction of masculinity and femininity stems from the opposition of one over the other – masculinity versus femininity, and vice versa. However while feminist movements have allowed for the dismantling of oppressive patriarchal ideals of femininity, there has been a slower movement towards acknowledging the same oppressive ideals of masculinity (Stephens, 2002). By drawing upon the work of R.W. Connell (1995) and his theories regarding hegemonic masculinity, there exists within society and thus literature a Romantic, heteronormative ideal of masculinity, and ‘how to be a man’. Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (1995: 77). Not only does hegemonic masculinity reinstate the binary between men and women as ‘natural’ and unavoidable, but it delegates a certain position to men and boys, a schema that they must follow to be ‘acceptable’ males. This creates a problem for boys that feel that they do not fit these culturally acceptable behaviours, as the dominant form of masculinity “appears simultaneously to propose a schema for behaviour and to insist on their subordination as children, to conflate agency with hegemonic masculinity” (Stephens, 2002:x). To move away from childhood and to ‘be a man’, one must adhere to this masculine schema. Perry Nodelman makes an interesting point as he draws comparison between femininity and masculinity. He states that while femininity, traditionally, manifests itself as a form of dress or a costume or role one is forced to put on and therefore something that is repressing identity, masculinity is the opposite: masculinity is traditionally understood as not being a form of dress. Instead, it is resistance to the act of being
repressed by conventional roles (Nodelman, 2002). Masculinity is taken to be natural and free, one’s true self (Connell, 1995; Nodelman, 2002). I believe that this idea is as problematic as the idea of femininity as Other and the subordination of women. Normative masculinity is repressive in exactly the same way as femininity is taken to be, as the construct of masculinity “connects with but does not necessarily coincide with maleness” (Nodelman 2002:2). Society and culture play an important role in either sustaining or challenging the existing gender patterns and behaviours, and children’s literature is one cultural site that can have a significant impact on how child readers understand the conflict between gender representations and human experience of gender, as well as the violent hierarchy that exists between men and women, masculine and feminine, and what that means for them.

Children’s literature that takes issue with patriarchal discourses of masculinity and maleness generally does so by introducing ‘new masculinities’ (Stephens, 2002). These narratives return agency to characters who may fail to conform to hegemonic masculinities that stipulate how men and boys should look and act (Flanagan 2010: 36). The Harry Potter series is one such narrative that takes issue with hegemonic masculinity, as it uses but does not rely on these stereotypical notions. Rather, it portrays male characters that suffer from self-doubt, that struggle with the more physical expectations that are placed upon them, and men that are kind, compassionate and care about the people that they love. These male characters are at the same time physically strong, brave leaders, and act compulsively in crisis. Instead of creating hyper-masculine men and boys, or effeminate men, Rowling has combined human qualities, rather than gendered ones, to create male characters that allow for different notions of masculinity.

The Boy Who Lived: Harry Potter and the Masculine Hero

In traditional hero stories, the hero grows into a strong man from a boy mistreated in some way by the adults around him. As he continues along his journey, the hero is confronted by enemies that he must overcome, to the rapture of those around him that he must save and protect from these enemies (Hourihan, 1997). Elizabeth Heilman argues that the Harry Potter narrative relies upon heteronormative
masculinity to present culturally ‘appropriate’ ways of being masculine, as the “strong, adventurous type of male serving as a heroic expression of masculinity, while the weak, unsuccessful male is mocked and sometimes despised” (Heilman, 2009:155). Drawing upon Connell, Heilman argues hegemonic masculinity is the most highly valued by society, and is “straight, strong, domineering, and oppresses not only women, but also the many men excluded from it” (Heilman, 2009:155).

Typically, the essence of the hero’s masculinity stems from his assertion of control, over himself, his environment, and the world and others around him (Hourihan, 1997). In this, the male hero must have masculine power over the other characters, including the other male characters: the hero must be abject to no other. Pugh and Wallace argue that this is a negative aspect of the quest narrative that the Harry Potter series relies upon. They claim that the heteronormative masculinity of the hero quest dictates that there can only be one hero, and to achieve heroic status, this male protagonist must be free of “any taint of sexual queerness and his masculinity must be unchallenged” (Pugh and Wallace, 2006: 272). This is why, they argue, the characters of Ron and Neville for example are effeminised, their masculinity ‘secondary’ to Harry’s, even if in Ron’s case he is physically bigger than Harry. There is not a great deal of attention paid to the physical descriptions of the characters, which is an interesting move away from traditional hero stories, where the characters’ physical appearance is linked to their personalities (Hourihan, 156).

Harry is first introduced to readers as skinny and bespectacled, with jet black hair, green eyes and knobbly knees. His eyes are an important aspect of the narrative, because they are so much like his mother’s, but the rest of his appearance is not really touched on throughout the narrative. As well, the positive male influences that Harry has in his life that are more powerful than he is, such as Dumbledore and Sirius, have to be taken out of the picture, to ensure that Harry plays the part of the solitary hero (Pugh and Wallace, 2006). The potential danger with this position is that by homogenising masculinity to accommodate a culturally acceptable ideal, it excludes other potential masculine positions. There are characters in the Harry Potter narrative that do not fit this culturally acceptable ideal, that are still important to the quest narrative and to the hero’s success. This potential for rethinking notions of masculinity in children’s literature will be examined further in my discussion of Neville Longbottom.
While Harry Potter is in many ways a typical hero in a typical fantasy quest narrative, the narrative and his characterisation does allow for a strong deconstruction of these typical notions of the masculine hero. He is naturally athletic, popular with most of his classmates, brave, and strong, as well as stubborn, quick to act, and compulsive. Harry is good at flying a broomstick from the first moment he does so in *The Philosopher's Stone*, and defies the school rules to become the youngest Seeker to play for a school team in a century (*PS*, 113). In the sixth book his athletic prowess is taken one step further as he is made the captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Heilman argues that part of Harry’s appeal comes from the fact that he is introduced to readers as a skinny, orphaned outsider who moves in to success in every area of his life, every important avenue of masculinity (Heilman, 2009:156). Harry’s success is satisfying to male readers who wish to move from “nerd to normal” (Kinney 1993, cited by Heilman 2009:156). But there are many instances in the series that show that Harry does not necessarily fit the over-confident, never-doubting fantasy hero. Looking back at Hourihan’s definition of the hero as needing to assert control over the world around him, readers can see that Harry is not necessarily in control all the time. He is actually virtually powerless in many ways: he is a child for the majority of the series, and has no real authority over the sites of social power such as the school or government. Hourihan also states that in traditional hero stories, the heroic role is a difficult one, as they “are never prey to self-doubt or uncertainty” (Hourihan 1997:72). Harry suffers from self-doubt and uncertainty across the series, and this self-doubt arguably grows as he gets older, rather than subsides, which is what is typically expected of the male hero. This self-doubt touches all aspects of his life: his academic work, his physicality and his relationships with others, as well as the fears he has that his power is not enough to match that of Voldemort.

In *Goblet of Fire*, when Harry, Ron and the other boys start to notice girls in a different light, Harry is plagued by self-doubt and uncertainty. Harry’s apparent lack of adolescent confidence contributes to the dismantling of gender dualisms because it suggests an element of fluidity, rather than dualism. In chapter twenty-two of *Goblet of Fire*, Harry is required to find a date to the Yule Ball. While he knows who he wants to ask, he lacks the initial courage to do so:
A week ago, Harry would have said finding a partner for a dance would be a cinch compared to taking on a Hungarian Horntail. But now that he had done the latter, and was facing the prospect of asking a girl to the ball, he thought he’d rather have another round with the Horntail...

He knew perfectly well whom he’d *like* to ask, but working up the nerve was something else... Cho was a year older than he was; she was very pretty; she was a very good Quidditch player, and she was also very popular (*GoF*, 338-339).

Despite his heterosexuality, one aspect of the text which critics argue supports heteronormative masculinity, Harry’s move towards manhood is plagued by feelings of self-doubt in regards to how he is seen by girls, and how he should interact with them. The above passage regarding the character of Cho, Harry’s first ‘love interest’, is interesting, because it puts her in a position of power over Harry. Harry is hesitant to ask Cho to the ball because she is a year older than him, very pretty and popular, and a very good Quidditch player. She makes Harry feel inferior; or at least nervous about the position he holds within his immediate society.

Harry also suffers doubt about his feelings towards his father and godfather, as well as about Dumbledore at different stages throughout the narrative. These male role models, instead of acting as a threat to Harry’s masculinity, arguably teach him how to be a good man, despite their being in his life for not very long. Sirius, the man Harry learns was his father’s best friend and his own godfather in book three, *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, provides Harry with the ‘father figure’ role that is expected of a fantasy quest narrative. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry is forced to see Sirius and his father James in a different light when he witnesses them tormenting Snape. Despite Harry’s dislike for Snape for the majority of the narrative, Harry is forced to question the reliability of his previous assumption about the inherent ‘goodness’ of the men he looks up to:

What was making Harry feel so horrified and unhappy was not being shouted at or having jars thrown at him; it was that he knew how it felt to be humiliated in the middle of a circle of onlookers, knew exactly how Snape had felt as his father had taunted him, and that judging from what he had just seen, his father had been every bit as arrogant as Snape had always told him (*OotP*, 573).
When Harry approaches Sirius later about these feelings and about what he saw in Snape’s memory, he says “I just never thought I’d feel sorry for Snape” (OotP, 592). This is important, because it shows that Harry has begun to feel compassion for characters that he previously did not. Compassion is not a typical trait of the fantasy male hero (Hourihan, 1997), and by portraying Harry in such a way, Rowling is suggesting that Harry can be a heroic character without giving up his humanity and compassion. Harry continues to dislike and distrust Snape up until the end of The Deathly Hallows, but he starts to acknowledge at least to himself that there are different sides to a person’s character. In The Half-Blood Prince, the sixth novel of the series, Harry also feels compassion for Draco, after he is forced by Voldemort to attempt to kill Dumbledore, or die himself:

Harry had not spared Malfoy much thought. His animosity was all for Snape, but he had not forgotten the fear in Malfoy’s voice on that Tower top, nor the fact that he had lowered his wand before the other Death Eaters arrived. Harry did not believe that Malfoy would have killed Dumbledore. He despised Malfoy still for his infatuation with the Dark Arts, but now the tiniest drop of pity mingled with his dislike. Where, Harry wondered, was Malfoy now, and what was Voldemort making him do under threat of killing him and his parents? (HBP, 596).

Until this point, Harry only saw Draco as a bully and nothing more, as the narrative has positioned Draco as a stereotypical villain, though one not as evil or dangerous as Voldemort or the adult Death Eaters. Harry does not want to be Draco’s friend, and they do not become friends, but he seems to understand the outside forces that have their own impact on Draco’s choices. Harry’s changing perception of Draco’s character enables the narrative and the reader to confront patriarchal connotations of the hero and the villain, as there is a move away from the inherent dichotomies between who is good, and who is bad. As will be explored further, Harry has more in common with Draco and more specifically Voldemort than a simple reading of the text would suggest, and this suggests another aspect of polyphony of masculine voices, away from the good versus evil binary.

As well as his compassion, Harry possesses other traits that can be seen as more ‘feminine’ or unconventionally masculine, which work together to create a
complex, imperfect boy hero struggling to figure out who he is. One such aspect of his personality is the fact that he longs for a family more than anything else. In the first novel, Harry discovers the Mirror of Erised, an enchanted mirror that shows you your heart’s deepest desire. More than fame or riches, Harry’s deepest desire is his family:

They just looked at him, smiling. And slowly, Harry looked into the faces of the other people in the mirror and saw other pairs of green eyes like his, other noses like his, even a little old man who looked as though he had Harry’s knobbly knees – Harry was looking at his family, for the first time in his life...he stared hungrily back at them, his hands pressed flat against the glass as though he was hoping to fall right through it and reach them. He had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness (PS, 153).

This half joy, half sadness is an important language choice, as Rowling draws in to consideration the dismantling of inherent dualisms that the hero must overcome to become the hero. As Hourihan states, the hero does not struggle with emotions; he is in complete control of his environment and the choices he must make (Hourihan, 1997). However Harry does struggle with his emotions, as he attempts to reconcile his positive feelings about his friends and peers, with the bitter realisation that he carries the fate of the world on his shoulders. How he expresses his emotions is an aspect of the narrative that may prove problematic in terms of notions of masculinity. Sadness is one emotion that Harry does struggle to express within the course of the narrative, especially as it goes on and the characters move into adolescence and eventually adulthood. In The Order of the Phoenix, when Sirius Black is killed, Harry reacts the way one would imagine a teenage boy would react to sudden loss:

It was his fault Sirius had died; it was all his fault. If he, Harry, had not been stupid enough to fall for Voldemort’s trick, if he had not been so convinced that what he had seen in his dream was real, if he had only opened his mind to the possibility that Voldemort was, as Hermione said, banking on Harry’s love of playing the hero... It was unbearable, he would not think about it, he could not stand it...there was a terrible hollow inside him he did not want to feel or examine, a dark hole where Sirius had been, where Sirius had vanished (OotP, 723).
Harry rages at Dumbledore when the latter suggests that “suffering like this proves you are still a man! This pain is part of being human” (*OotP*, 726), and tells him “THEN – I – DON’T – WANT – TO – BE – HUMAN” (*OotP*, 726). Harry’s shouting at Dumbledore and throwing things around the room, his adolescent rage is his way of dealing with his sadness, something that is often attributed to the typical male hero (Hourihan, 1997). This may be seen as a negative thing, because Harry’s inability to talk about his feelings particularly in this scene sustains the gendered discourse of masculinity, that the male hero stands alone. However, Harry does share his feelings about the prophecy and the loss of Sirius with Ron and Hermione, as he has always relied on them. As well, Harry’s struggle with his grief reminds us that he is still only fifteen years old, and has just lost the closest thing to a father that he has ever known. Webb (2008) states that Harry’s understanding of his own emotions is limited by his age as he attempts to negotiate them from a position of childhood simplicity, combined with a move towards the complexities of increased maturity. The reader is likewise placed in this position of increasing maturity, as the narrative shifts from the childish ‘happily ever after’ that *The Philosopher’s Stone* introduced, to a world where even the good characters die, from *The Goblet of Fire* and onwards (Webb, 2008). By creating characters that struggle with the expectations of what it means to be masculine, and an adolescent, as Harry is clearly doing here, Rowling has instead moved away from masculinity as the focal issue, to focus instead on humanism, and what it means to be human in a world full of cultural expectation. Frances Devlin-Glass states that

> the pint-size and very ordinary wizard might triumph often against his adversaries (thanks to his friends and guardians) but he is far from being the self-loving or self-assured hero his enemies would wish to construct him as: he suffers from radical self-doubt; he relies heavily on his friendships and networks for support; and he even on occasion rages defensively, trembles and has tantrums when legitimately upset…Harry is not a vengeful hero, though he has reason to be, but rather one whose aim is merely survival in a murderous world (2005: 56).

This ‘murderous world’ can be seen as a reflection of the dangers that young male readers face in the real world, when cultural expectations stand in the way of individual agency and voice, when symbolic violence imprisons them. Harry is and isn’t a typically masculine hero, and this is just as important as Hermione is and isn’t
a typically female character. Harry subverts the typical notion of the masculine superhero as he combines both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits. These ‘feminine’ traits do not make him an emasculated boy character, but neither do the ‘masculine’ aspects of his personality silence other traits.

"I'm worth twelve of you, Malfoy." Neville Longbottom: The Other Hero

As I’ve already discussed, readers experience the world and the events of the narrative through Harry’s point of view, and his role as the hero has certain expectations. Pugh and Wallace (2006) have a point in that Harry’s masculinity is the most significant aspect of the narrative, because he is the heroic protagonist; readers experience the narrative through Harry’s experience. However I disagree that this makes the masculinity of the other male characters less important or that those characters have been effeminised by the narrative. One such character that is interesting to look at in terms of hegemonic masculinity and his position in comparison to Harry is Neville Longbottom. While he is initially typecast as a ‘silly’ boy who fails at just about everything he attempts, as the novels progress and the characters get older, readers learn that Neville is stronger and more complex than he is originally made out to be, and that he and Harry have more in common than what appears on the surface. To link back to Hollindale’s theory of the three levels of ideology within children’s literature, it is clear that cultural discourse is being challenged. On a surface level, it is apparent that Harry and Neville are two very different characters, Harry being the hero and Neville the silly male companion. An implicit reading of the narrative suggests that Harry and Neville have more in common than a simple reading would suggest, because of certain narrative hints that Rowling puts into place, such as the Sorting Hat placing Neville in the Gryffindor house, thus suggesting an element of bravery. This leaves readers to decide how Neville fits in the wider narrative, not as Harry’s silly friend or the comic relief of the series, but as a strong character in his own right.

Annette Wannamaker discusses the character of Neville in some detail in regards to the notion of hegemonic masculinity, and the feminisation of the male characters that ‘threaten’ Harry’s position as the hero. Critics such as Terrence Pugh
and David Wallace (2006) argue that the *Harry Potter* narrative and characters support heteronormative heroism, where the heroism depends upon an alpha-male mode of masculinity. That is, Harry’s masculinity must be unchallenged by the other male characters, to ensure he can play out the hero role. Like Harry, Neville is sorted into Gryffindor in the first novel of the series, which as readers know suggests he must have some element of courage. However for the majority of the series, Neville is not a typically masculine character, and a simple reading of the narrative would suggest that he has been written this way in order to support the hegemonic masculinity that Harry represents. My research suggests otherwise, however, as a more implicit reading of the narrative portrays Neville in a more profound position than one would originally have thought, one that presents another ‘new’ masculinity.

In *The Philosopher’s Stone* Neville is first introduced to readers as “round-faced” and “tearful” (*PS*, 78) and meets Harry when he is asking for help looking for his lost pet toad. As the novel progresses, we quickly learn that Neville is not particularly brave, clever or interesting. Neville is not good at sports, is not very academic except in the study of Herbology, is not handsome like Harry, and does not have a lot of self-confidence. Critics of Rowling such as Pugh and Wallace (2006), and Heilman (2009) see this ‘feminisation’ of Neville’s character as a danger to boy readers who may not relate to the super athletic, brave and popular hero that they argue Harry represents, however as the narrative goes on and the characters grow older, Neville is revealed to be a great deal more complex than once thought. His difficult childhood, painful family history, and quirky behaviour make him one of the more interesting characters; he likes studying plants and is not very physically strong, but he also battles Death Eaters, and, like Harry, wants to avenge the hurt that Voldemort has caused to his family. According to Wannamaker (2008), Neville is portrayed sympathetically by Rowling even though he is rarely stereotypically masculine. In *The Philosopher’s Stone*, Neville is picked on by Draco and the other Slytherin students, as well as generally regarded as silly by his Gryffindor peers. Towards the end of the novel though, Neville gets a chance to stand up against his friends because he fears they will get the Gryffindor house into trouble:

But Neville was clearly steeling himself to do something desperate.

‘I won’t let you do it,’ he said, hurrying to stand in front of the portrait hole.
‘I’ll – “I’ll fight you!’
'Neville,' Ron exploded, 'get away from that hole and don’t be an idiot - '

'Don’t you call me an idiot!' said Neville. ‘I don’t think you should be breaking any more rules! And you were the one who told me to stand up to people!’

…

He [Ron] took a step forward and Neville dropped Trevor the toad, who leapt out of sight.

‘Go on then, try and hit me!’ said Neville, raising his fists. ‘I’m ready!’ (PS, 198).

This is the first time that Neville presents an element of self-confidence, and the fact that he stands up to his friends makes it more important, a point celebrated in the final moments of the book by Dumbledore:

‘There are all kinds of courage,’ said Dumbledore, smiling. ‘It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr Neville Longbottom’ (PS, 221).

These ten points win Gryffindor the House Cup, and Neville is celebrated by his peers as much as Harry, Ron and Hermione are. True, Neville’s examples of self-confidence and standing up for himself are limited until the fourth book, but his self-determination grows as he does. In The Goblet of Fire, readers begin to see Neville in a different light than in the previous three books, as his proficiency in Herbology becomes apparent. This is Neville’s first real talent that is showcased by Rowling in the narrative, and while he uses this talent to help Harry, it is already clear that Neville is not the simple boy he has been made out to be. In The Order of the Phoenix, we learn that Neville’s parents were tortured into insanity by Bellatrix Lestrange, one of Voldemort’s closest supporters. Like Harry, Neville was raised by someone other than his parents because of Voldemort, and understands what it feels like to not have a real family. When Harry, Ron and Hermione create the rebel group ‘Dumbledore’s Army’, also in The Order of the Phoenix, we also start to see a more magically talented and powerful side to Neville, as he begins to learn to use defensive magic alongside the other group members.
As the narrative becomes darker, the characters and their relationships to others become more complex, as well. By the end of *Order of the Phoenix*, for example, readers know that Harry and Neville have more in common than originally thought. The prophecy given to Dumbledore that spoke of “the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord” (*OotP*, 741) could have referred to two boys – Harry, or Neville. *The Deathly Hallows* is the penultimate book for Neville’s personal growth, and when he comes into his own. Since Harry has left the school, it is Neville who takes his place as leader of Dumbledore’s Army as the students attempt to undermine the dictatorship-like regime that has taken over Hogwarts. Neville is routinely tortured and cursed by the Death Eater professors for refusing to do things such as using Unforgiveable Curses on younger students. At the climax of *Deathly Hallows*, it is Neville who draws Gryffindor’s sword from the Sorting Hat and uses it to kill Nagini, Voldemort’s final Horcrux:

> In one swift, fluid motion Neville broke free of the Body-Bind Curse upon him; the flaming Hat fell off him and he drew from its depths something silver, with a glittering, rubied handle –
>
> …
>
> With a single stroke, Neville sliced off the great snake’s head, which spun high in the air, gleaming in the light flooding from the Entrance Hall, and Voldemort’s mouth was open in a scream of fury that nobody could hear, and the snake’s body thudded to the ground at his feet (*DH*, 587).

Again, this act is one that helps Harry achieve his ultimate goal of defeating Voldemort, one that Harry specifically asked Neville to do, but without Neville’s actions the narrative could have ended very differently. Readers already know that only a true Gryffindor can pull the sword from the Sorting Hat, and this proves Neville’s courage and position as a heroic character. To go back to Hollindale’s third dimension of literary ideology, cultural discourse plays an important role in defining how a reader would respond to the secondary hero position that the narrative has placed Neville in. To rely on a culturally acceptable ideal of the masculine hero would be to demean Neville’s final position in the narrative, so it is important to put aside this culturally acceptable notion and examine the role of masculinity from a different perspective.
There is polyphony of masculine voices within the *Harry Potter* narrative, and these voices allow for various interpretations of the notion of masculinity, as a dialogue is being created between the text, the character voices and the reader interpretation. Bakhtin (1981) refers to this process as “dialogism”, and argues that dialogism allows for a greater interaction between different meanings within a text, all of which have the potential of conditioning others (Bakhtin, 1981:426). These masculine voices are not always in opposition with one another, either; that is, they are not fighting for dominance. Hourihan argues that close male friendships are common in children’s literature, and do not necessarily have to involve a “socially inferior companion” to be “sometimes quite emotionally complex and intense” (Hourihan, 1997:79). Indeed, the hero is usually very conscious of his dependence upon the support of his friends, and this is true for Harry. While Hourihan specifies male friendships in this instance, and argues that this often leaves no room for the hero to be friends with female characters, this is still relevant in regards to the notion of a heteronormative masculine hero and what that means for the male characters that work alongside Harry. When Harry learns the truth about the fate of Neville’s parents, as well as the fact that the prophecy about himself and Voldemort could just as easily have referred to Neville, he begins to feel sympathy for Neville, though not pity, which is an important distinction. Harry begins to see Neville in a different light, away from the stereotypical ‘silly’ boy and as a result readers do, as well. Harry feels guilty that he had already spent five years with Neville and had never asked him why he was raised by his grandmother (*GoF*, 528); an aspect of Harry’s personality that takes him away from the stereotypical male hero that needs ultimate control over other types of masculinity. Like Harry, there’s no need for Neville to lose his sensitivity to be a brave character, and neither does he necessarily have to become a great athlete or academic to be considered heroic. Masculinity does not have to be about emotionless, physical strength, with one male hero dominating the other male characters for the sake of the narrative.
Pampered Little Princes

To say that gender stereotypes do not exist in the Harry Potter novels would be as simple and incorrect as it is to say that the narrative is made up of just stereotype. Rowling uses typical gender tropes to pull apart these stereotypes, and to suggest different ways of being masculine or feminine. The male/female, masculine/feminine binaries that exist in literature cannot be simply inverted – the problem with inversion is deciding who gets to define masculine and feminine, and what constitutes a strong male or female character. Thus the examples of stereotypically male and female characters are important to examine, because they provide a comparison point to the characters that are more fluid in their treatment of masculinity and femininity. Annette Wannamaker uses the term ‘hyper-masculine’ to explore characters of the Harry Potter series that do embody stereotypically gendered behaviours and what this means for the intended reader, as well as how these characters relate to the more fluid representations of gender. Characters like Vernon and Dudley Dursley, Harry’s uncle and cousin respectively, and Crabbe and Goyle, Draco Malfoy’s two friends, are considered by Wannamaker to be ‘hyper-masculine’ characters, and interestingly enough they are one-sided and unlikeable. This suggests something negative about the stereotype of masculinity – at least the idea that to be masculine you must be all brawn and no brains.

Vernon Dursley is described in the narrative as “a big, beefy man with hardly any neck” (PS, 7) and is the director of a drill-making firm called Grunnings. According to Annette Wannamaker, Vernon is “successfully masculine in very conventional ways”: he is a large man, the head of a household, and directs a successful business that makes a very ‘masculine’ product (Wannamaker, 133). Vernon is loud, rude, and violent, and though loves his son Dudley, does not show it in any way, except for the occasional hair ruffle or “Atta boy, Dudley!” (PS, 21). As well, Dudley is portrayed as a conventionally masculine boy. A bully like his father, Dudley is cruel and violent towards Harry for the majority of their time together, and does not show Harry any kind of compassion until they finally part at the beginning of the final book. Wannamaker draws attention to an interesting point in that it is these ‘hyper-masculine’ characters that are also stupid, or at least not interested in literature. She argues that boy readers who are victimised by other boys because
they do not easily conform to hegemonic masculinity can take pleasure in the unflattering portrayal of a macho, semiliterate bully and in the power that Harry and his friends in the Wizarding world gain from reading. Though Harry and Ron are not as studious as Hermione, they still gain their power and knowledge from books, rather than the Internet or television (Wannamaker, 2008). Both Dudley and Vernon Dursley are made to look ridiculous through their rigid adherence to exaggerated and stereotypical masculinity, and this gives power to the more unconventional ideals of masculinity which characters like Harry and Neville represent. The characters that rely on stereotypical, ‘hyper’ notions of masculinity are the characters that readers do not relate to, or even really like.

What is interesting is that there is a clear distinction between the unlikeable characters and the evil ones. That is, while the unlikeable characters are characters that embody hyper-masculine traits, and these traits are what make them so unlikeable, the truly evil characters are not so easily defined. Voldemort is not a typically masculine character: he is not physically strong, but magically so. As discussed earlier, knowledge and book learning are the ways in which one gains strength in this world. Voldemort is touted throughout the series as being a great wizard, “terrible…but great” (PS, 65), so clearly gained his strength through these less than masculine means. Also like Harry, Voldemort had a difficult upbringing; he was orphaned as a baby and raised in a Muggle orphanage, and did not have a family until he began school at Hogwarts. Thus, while Voldemort must have some element of inherent magical skill, he would have had to learn it from books and practice, like Harry and Hermione did. Voldemort also struggled with human emotions, but this is where the similarities between the two ends, as Harry learnt how to express his emotions and to rely on his friends, whereas Voldemort could not stand pity or the help of others. Voldemort’s lack of hegemonic masculinity suggests something different about the villain role within fantasy literature, as well as the constant pressure that Harry feels because of the similarities that exist between himself and his enemy. Hourihan states that we “create wolves” (1997:126) the same way that we create heroes, and the hero/villain binary is invoked in an interesting way here, as the dualisms between the two characters are blurred by their similarities. To link Voldemort’s position in the narrative back to the notion of hegemonic masculinity then, it is clear to see that even the villain, the one character
that readers are supposed to hate, brings into question a new idea of masculinity, or of how to be a man. Voldemort’s lack of physical strength, and his learning of the magical art by books rather than innate skill, allows for readers to see in Voldemort a different kind of masculinity. The polyphony of masculine voices within the Harry Potter narrative is offering difference, rather than implying what kind of masculine hero they must relate to. Hollindale states:

if children who are citizens of one country live in worlds within a world, discrete subcultures within a culture, they will need different storytelling voices to speak to them – voices which can speak within an ideology which for them is coherent and complete (1991:15).

The subversion of stereotypical notions and ideals of gender cannot be achieved by simply inverting the male and female characters, by creating strong, active women and passive men. To do this would be to reinstate the male/female binary and the abjection of one over the other. Instead, the Harry Potter narrative depicts the polyphony of masculine voices that challenge and subvert hyper-masculinity, allowing the intended reader to dialogically interact with multiple representations of masculinity. In the Harry Potter narrative it is okay to be good at sports as well as kind to your friends, and bravery and self-doubt can go together rather than exist in direct opposition to each other.

Conclusion

Inversion is not the same as subversion. Simply inverting typically masculine and feminine traits does not guarantee a deconstruction of traditional character archetypes. Rather it perpetuates the idea that there exists an inherent binary between male and female characters, and their representation of culturally acceptable masculine and feminine traits. In terms of children’s literature, heteronormative representations of gender prove problematic for readers that may not feel they fit into the acceptable mode of masculinity or femininity. Deconstruction of heteronormative gender requires a new cultural order, and polyphony of
masculine and feminine voices in children’s literature, to create room for those readers who feel different.

The Harry Potter series plays an important role in the deconstruction process. While they may appear to fit culturally acceptable moulds of specific fantasy tropes, Rowling’s principal characters suggest more fluid ideals of the archetypes that readers have come to expect from fantasy literature. Harry is the hero of the narrative, there is no denying that, however there are times when he does not necessarily live up to every single heroic expectation. He is strong, active and popular, but he is also often plagued by self-doubt. Neville Longbottom is a character that appears silly and ridiculous at first, but as he grows into his confidence he also grows into a stronger, more relatable role. Likewise, Hermione is not simply the girl sidekick, the enabler and helper of Harry’s adventures, as she combines intelligence and strength with kindness and compassion. She does not have to set aside her intelligence in order to be a kind friend, and neither does she become cold as she grows into her self-confidence. By drawing upon theories such as symbolic violence and dialogism, it is clear to see that the Harry Potter characters challenge traditional, repressive representations of masculinity and femininity. Instead, these characters embody fluid gender characteristics that make them human, rather than just masculine or feminine. Through this research, it is clear to see that traditional representations of both masculinity and femininity are repressive, and can prove problematic for child readers who experience gender differently. By concentrating on polyphony of male and female voice, Rowling is able to represent basic needs of the human condition: to be loved and accepted by others, for family and friends, for agency and self-worth, and individual voice in a world that is trying to destroy anything that may be different.
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