

Harry Potter and the Invisible Hand:

The Notion of Inevitable Inequality, and ‘Niceness’ as
Moral Action in J.K. Rowling’s Neoliberal Fantasy

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Thesis re-submitted after revisions for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2021

DECLARATION

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SUMMARY

My thesis analyses J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books as a series of fantasy texts which perpetuate and disseminate contemporary neoliberal ideological messages. My central aim is to demonstrate how, using the metaphor of magic as a fundamentally mysterious force that regulates all action, Rowling offers a vision of civil society which is hegemonically structured on an immutable hierarchy, where the only mode of possible moral action is depicted as individual acts of niceness. While such a message is transmitted as optimistic and celebratory, I demonstrate how deeply contingent such moral action is made on the perpetuation of underlying inequality.

My selection of *Harry Potter* as primary text has been motivated by its remarkable impact on global socio-political culture; the visions of morality and autonomy in the books have been celebrated and adopted into cultural expressions. At the same time, the books transmit subtly 'conservative and hierarchical notions of authority clothed in evangelistic mythopoeic fantasy' (Mendlesohn, "Crowning" 181). To analyse how these conservative messages are subtly formulated as celebratory and optimistic, I employ a twofold methodological approach; I build on existing scholarship in children's literature, fantasy, and *Harry Potter* to demonstrate the narrative strategies and themes used by Rowling, and analyse my findings using cultural criticism and economic scholarship on neoliberal political economy to ascertain what the ideological ramifications of such strategies are. My theoretical framework draws upon a Marxist critique of hegemonic structures and ideological formulations of

individual moral values, as well as Michel Foucault's work in identifying biopolitics, or the systemic reconfiguration of individuals into interpellated subjects. I build upon existing children's literature criticism which has analysed the strategies and ideological messages disseminated in *Harry Potter* and similar works of fantasy, and locate myself within a specific understanding of the neoliberal underpinnings of the texts' dissemination of moral messages.

I locate my research at the juncture of children's literature scholarship and socio-political analysis of contemporary ideological models which regulate and influence the perception of morality. While the issue of *Harry Potter*'s conservative morality has been researched and analysed by existing criticism, my research identifies and demonstrates such moral messages as a symptom of Rowling's neoliberal fantasy. Identifying the ideological roots of cultural texts which disseminate individual niceness as a sufficient mode of moral action in civil society, while denying the possibility of introspection into the roots of the fundamentally unequal status quo, is of particular importance in a world which is becoming increasingly pliant to the idea that a hierarchy, where 'by definition certain people must be left behind' (Littler 3), is inevitable and fixed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude, first, to my supervisor, Dr. Padraic Whyte, for his guidance and support over the last five years of my life as a postgraduate student at Trinity College Dublin. He has offered me advice and encouragement consistently, which has helped me transform myself from an aspiring student of children's literature into a confident researcher eager to pursue my field of study. He has regularly ensured that I had the finest opportunities to present my work and to network with people whose inputs have been priceless for my career, and I would like to thank him for the immense kindness he has shown me since my first day in Ireland.

The staff at the School of English, Trinity College Dublin, have all my gratitude for giving me the best possible opportunity to become a researcher of literature. I would like to thank Dr. David O'Shaughnessy and Dr. Jane Carroll for their valuable input on my PhD, and to Dr. Clare Clark, Dr. Amanda Piesse, and Dr. Emma Vyroubalova for giving me the opportunity to teach the Undergraduate courses co-ordinated by them, where I have discovered my love for teaching Shakespeare. Last but not at all the least, I wish to thank Ruth Archbold, Brenda Brooks, Diane Sadler, and Dr. Bernice Murphy, without whom I would not have been able to fulfill my administrative duties during my time in Trinity.

Financial support is always a big concern for a non-EU student, and I have to thank the School of English, and the family of Dr. William F. Pyle, especially Ms. Sheelagh O'Neill for their kindness in funding my research. I would also like to thank the Yale-TCD Alumni Bursary and the Trinity Trust Travel Fund for helping me fund my international research trips to Yale University and the International Society for the Study of Children's Literature in Toronto, Canada, respectively. These research trips were, and shall always be, the highlights of my career, and I could not begin to express how enriching these experiences have been for me.

My friends in Trinity College and UCD have made me fall in love with Dublin as a second home, and I would like to thank Joana, Vikram Da, Bidisha Di, Naloke, Tukai, Pratyush Da, and Julie Di for the kindness and love they have shown to me. And finally, I would like to thank Anirban, Madhumita, Tithi, and Adwitia, that is to say, "my family and other animals." Without them, none of this would have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Overview

My thesis is a critical examination of neoliberalism and moral action¹ in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007).² This analysis sets out to explore how Rowling uses the metaphor of magic, and the structuring of her fantasy world as an ontologically fixed wizard/muggle hierarchy, to offer a worldview where 'exclusion is the order of the day,' and where "muggles... are shoved to the margins of society or outright shunned' (Bell, "Riddle" 51). In such a society, morally good action is depicted as concerned with preserving this existing status quo, rather than radically questioning it. This construction of the quest as 'restoration rather than instauration (the making over of the world),' as Farah Mendlesohn argues, is a strategy utilised in portal and quest fantasies. This strategy shapes within the narrative a 'directive and coercive' ideology which is concerned with the right people occupying the positions of power as a marker of moral stability, rather than any investigation of the structure of power itself (*Rhetorics* 3).³ It is important to note here that *Harry Potter* can be

¹ These are two key terms I use throughout my thesis, and I provide a working definition for both in Section 3 of this chapter.

² I use the UK publications of these books as my primary texts. Six of Rowling's books cited in this thesis are first editions (*Stone*; *Chamber*; *Azkaban*; *Phoenix*; *Prince*; *Hallows*), with the exception of one second edition text (*Goblet*). I also use Rowling's *Quidditch Through the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* as occasional references. My thesis is focused on literary analysis, and film criticism lies outside the scope of my work. However, I occasionally demonstrate how the films serve to highlight certain instances from the books.

³ Analyses of the hero in children's literature have demonstrated that while the "preoccupation with social position" has largely moved away from contemporary realistic texts, it is still an important theme in fantasy texts which portray "pseudo-medieval societies and aristocratic heroes." In such fiction, "hierarchies are images of order," and good, heroic action is concerned with the preservation, rather than challenging, of hierarchies (Hourihan 63-65). This strategy has been used in children's and young adult literature to draw attention away from the problematic inequality of the hierarchy itself. Instead, such texts are configured by an ideology which insists that individualistic action, rather than collective reorganisation, is the preferable mode of moral action. The hero acts morally because he has access to a

classified most accurately as a wainscot fantasy, characterised by ‘invisible or undetected societies living in the interstices of the dominant world’ (Clute and Grant 991). However, Rowling uses the setting of a wainscot fantasy to construct her narrative which resembles most closely the ideological strategies employed in portal and quest fantasies. It is thus productive to analyse her work with respect to these major strategies. Rowling’s portrayal of the naive hero, the downloading of information by adult guides, a fixed hierarchy of power, a world which constantly expands but does not provide a history, and a plot driven by destinarianism, are all deeply resonant with the ideology of neoliberal governmentality.

Throughout my thesis, I shall demonstrate that Rowling’s work contains an ideology which perpetuates this neoliberal, hierarchical view of the world as ‘a competitive, linear, hierarchical system in which by definition certain people must be left behind’ (Littler 3). This is a vision central to contemporary neoliberalism, which insists that this hierarchical structure, which I shall henceforth refer to as status quo, is unchangeable, and ‘there is no alternative’ to it (Thatcher, “Correspondents”). Rowling presents compensatory niceness as her protagonist’s primary mode of moral behaviour.⁴ This comprises a performative code of etiquette which insists upon acting nicely towards one’s

hierarchy which bestows upon him the tools to act in the first place (Dorfman 115-117; Leser 26). I build upon this critical analysis, and demonstrate how Rowling uses this strategy to portray moral action as benevolent, individualistic patronisation of an inherently weaker underclass, rather than a radical change to the hierarchy itself. This insistence on individual action, I argue, is a fundamental feature of neoliberal ideology.

⁴ Compensatory niceness is a mode of socio-political behaviour, which prioritises the reduction of class resentment through public displays of affection or benevolence, over addressing the hierarchical roots of class inequality itself. Closely associated with acts of charity and philanthropy, this strategy shifts public discourse on inequality and moral action from the socio-economic register to an emotional, performative one. See Section 3 for a detailed discussion.

inferiors as an alternative to radical engagement with why such inferiority exists. This mode of action is symptomatic of a cultural shift in the perception of moral action from economic and social considerations towards symbolic gestures since the 1980s (Pfaller). I argue that by depicting compensatory niceness to one's inferiors as the model of morally good behaviour in such a world, *Harry Potter* perpetuates a vision of individual autonomy and agency which is largely superficial and performative.

An assessment of how magic is used in the books as a metaphor for explaining this underlying hierarchy provides the space to investigate how Rowling perpetuates the notion of an invisible hand, which controls all individual autonomy.⁵ As my thesis demonstrates, this invisible hand in terms of magic is largely concealed at the narrative level from the child characters. An analysis into the books' portrayal of Hogwarts School, the Ministry of Magic, the wizardly market and other institutions crucial to the plots, however, makes it visible. My thesis builds on existing scholarship on the moral messages disseminated in *Harry Potter*, and offers a fresh examination of the books as *specifically* guided by contemporary neoliberalism, of which the moral inadequacy analysed by such critics is a symptom. My research achieves this by analysing how Rowling employs strategies and thematic elements common to the portal-quest fantasy (and sporadically, in the later books of the series, intrusion fantasy). I demonstrate how the ideological effects of those

⁵ Although the term invisible hand was coined by the classical liberal economist Adam Smith, my use of the term is in keeping with its definition in contemporary neoliberal discourse. This metaphor assumes an impersonal, innate set of principles by the use of which the market regulates itself. Proponents of neoliberal free market economy use this assumption to defend the deregulation of market capitalism, offering an interpretation of any economic inequality as a 'natural' product of the market, while absolving the state of any responsibility in addressing such issues (Bishop, *Smith* 165-180).

strategies on the narrative are deeply analogous to the ideological construction of important cultural notions in neoliberal political economy. This analysis of *Harry Potter* as a specifically neoliberal fantasy offers a methodological template for future investigations into the manner in which global cultural artefacts are informed by and perpetuate the changing notions of morality and individual autonomy in a late capitalist, neoliberal socio-economic world. These notions, in turn, contribute to a certain moral complacency with regard to questions of inequality and injustice. Existing literature on the subject of *Harry Potter* has analysed and demonstrated the troubling conservatism of Rowling's visions of justice and morality.⁶ My research builds on such findings, and demonstrates this conservatism to be deeply informed by the specific ideology of neoliberal capitalism. This thesis brings critical scholarship on children's literature and Rowling's books together with cultural and economic criticism on neoliberalism. In doing so, my work contributes to a better understanding of how portal and quest fantasy texts offer an efficient medium for the dissemination of the contemporary neoliberal view of the world as inherently and unchangeably unequal, which prioritises a superficial and compensatory model of moral action.

⁶ See Section 2.3 for a review of such existing scholarship.

2. Context: Critical Framework

2.1. Ideology and Children's Literature Criticism

The importance of ideological and political notions which inform and are perpetuated in books for young readers has received critical attention since the early days of children's literature scholarship. Reading ideological and intellectual history in texts, of course, is pertinent to literature as a whole, it being a style of criticism extensively developed in 20th century New Historicist scholarship (Greenblatt, *Curse*).⁷ However, this practice gains special importance with regard to children's books because of the hierarchical relationship between author and reader particular to this category of texts; children's literature is written by mature adults for children at early stages of maturity. 'No body of literature... rests so openly,' Jacqueline Rose argues, 'on an acknowledged difference, a rupture almost, between writer and addressee' (*Pan* 2). This difference in age and maturity between writer and addressee raises the question of 'uses' of children's books in a unique manner compared to any other category of literature (Crago, "Periphery" 157-158). Whether didactically or subversively in relation to the dominant culture, this 'use' of children's books has often been a process of acculturation for young readers. As John Stephens argues, 'Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values,' which may include 'contemporary morality and ethics...and aspirations about the present and future' (*Ideology* 3). A significant

⁷ Greenblatt's work in the early 1990s is considered the foundational basis of New Historicism, and has since been developed on by research into the close relation between literary criticism and historical context (Smallwood, *Critical*).

amount of children's literature scholarship, therefore, has critically examined the role of dominant ideology and political history in shaping the narratives of texts for young readers.⁸

Children's books can disseminate and perpetuate dominant ideology in a number of ways, as identified by Peter Hollindale ("Ideology"). The most easily detectable of these ways is one dominated by the author's 'wish to recommend...to children through the story' her/his 'explicit social, political, moral beliefs' (27). This strategy runs the risk of often coming across as too heavy-handed or didactic, however, and Hollindale identifies a more efficient and pervasive strategy he calls passive ideology. This involves the 'writer's unexamined assumptions' structuring the narrative being written, and the ideological notions being disseminated effectively in the texts, because 'unexamined, passive values are widely shared values' (30). I argue that this second strategy is the one employed by Rowling in constructing her ideologically driven narrative. As I shall demonstrate over the course of my thesis, the passive (rather than explicit) ideology of the books is a crucial factor in the construction of narratives which are optimistic and celebratory about individual autonomy in the conflict against evil. The problematic undertones of how such autonomy is contingent upon the invisible hand of the unchanging status quo and its value system are hidden at the narrative level, because as

⁸ This scholarship includes theoretical criticism of ideology, and how it informs the narratives of children's texts (Keys and McGillicuddy; Stephens, *Ideology*). Other scholars have undertaken specific case studies of children's literature being used to disseminate politically motivated messages and often propaganda for young readers, from texts for young readers in Soviet Russia (Husband, "Soviet" 300-318) to educational literature in Maoist China (Sheng 97-111). My thesis builds on this body of work to offer a similar study of *Harry Potter* as a text informed by the specific neoliberal discourse of the late 20th century.

unexamined, passive values, they are never explicitly engaged with. Discussing ideology and literature (albeit in a different literary context), G. Waller argues that ideology ‘works to *conceal* struggles and repressions, to force language into conveying only those meanings reinforced by the dominant forces of our society’ (“Poetry” 10). The first two chapters of this thesis, in particular, shall analyse how the metaphor of magic is employed to conceal the underlying problems of Rowling’s fantasy world.

2.2. Fantasy and Children’s Literature Criticism

Within children’s literature, I focus on children’s fantasy specifically because this covert ideological strategy is an effective tool in the genre. ‘If the fictional world is fully imagined and realised,’ Hollindale contends, ‘it may carry its ideological burden more covertly... trusting to [sic] literary organisation rather than explicitly didactic guidelines to achieve a moral effect’ (“Ideology” 29). The literary organisation and the strategies employed in world-building and narrative structure in fantasy are key factors in the construction of such narratives with specific ideological aims. Various scholars have examined fantasy from different perspectives; from structural criticism of the fantastic,⁹ to

⁹ Rosemary Jackson’s scholarship is an important example of this kind of research. Her analysis focuses on ‘examining the conditions and the possibilities of fantasy as a literary mode in terms of its forms, features, basic elements and structures’ (*Fantasy* 4). This mode of research derives from structuralist analyses of fantasy (Todorov; Propp), and often prioritises the examination of how the fantastic is structured, and how it is differentiated from the ‘real’ world (Hume, *Mimesis*).

the examination of themes and motifs,¹⁰ to feminist criticism,¹¹ and the examination of archetypes in fantasy texts.¹² I build on such criticism to demonstrate the pervasive ideological influence of neoliberalism on Rowling's texts. While I draw upon structural and thematic analyses of how the fantasy world is constructed in the books, my approach differs from a purely structural analysis by examining the strategies used by Rowling to demarcate between good and evil action. Subsequently, I combine this analysis of narrative strategies with cultural and economic criticism to demonstrate how such strategies primarily ensure the dissemination of neoliberal ideological constructions of moral action. For the analysis of such narrative strategies, I build on the work of Farah Mendlesohn, whose categorisation of four broad types of fantasy is crucial in identifying and analysing the different strategies used in a text (*Rhetorics*). In particular, Rowling employs the 'directive and coercive' narrative strategy of portal and quest fantasy which associates 'the condition of the land with the morality of the place' (3). As I shall discuss later

¹⁰ Such criticism identifies and analyses the narrative significance of common themes which have been used in much of 20th century fantasy. J.B Croft's scholarship on the symbolic importance of names in fantasy offers a comparative analysis of how authors like J.R.R. Tolkien and Rowling use the names of characters and places to describe them in certain ways ("Naming" 149-163). Elsewhere, he also analyses the theme of fate and destiny as a governing force for heroes in quest fantasy ("Turin" 155-170). Tom Shippey's seminal work on Tolkien also examines a number of themes in *The Lord of the Rings* which continue to be popular in later fantasy (*Century*). Thematic scholarship makes it possible to locate these common themes in Rowling's work, and compare her use of these with how other authors have employed them in similar texts.

¹¹ Feminist scholarship examines gender roles in fantasy, and the marginalisation or empowerment of female characters as indicative of the ideological stance of the narratives. Ursula Le Guin identifies that the model of heroism in fantasy has always been traditionally masculine (*Revisioned* 8), and Margery Hourihan maps the evolving depiction of women in texts for young readers over time, and how more subversive and empowering depictions of female characters have become common in texts informed by feminist ideology (157-203). A number of critics have analysed the intersection between gender roles and combat in fantasy (Fredrick and McBride 29-42), the contrast between the depiction of women as accessory characters and as heroes (Rawls 129-149), and feminist narrative strategies in postmodern fantasy (Bacchilega). I draw upon this mode of scholarship for my analyses of how gender is used in the texts to portray the social dynamics of magical life in Rowling's books.

¹² The study of archetypes in folklore and fairy tales is part of a long tradition of scholarship (Bettelheim; Frye). The critical tools offered by such criticism have been used to identify the use of archetypes, from authority figures in fantasy who represent moral touchstones (Riga, "Merlin" 21-44) to the use of mythology in world-building (Hiley 838-860).

with reference to methodology, the three final books in the series, in particular, also draw upon strategies utilised in intrusion fantasy. Analysing *how* Rowling constructs her magical world reveals the ideological messages disseminated in her books, and the manner in which such ideology shapes notions of autonomy and morality.

Rowling's *Harry Potter* books are part of a tradition of English fantasy literature which employs similar narrative strategies to disseminate dominant ideological messages. Colin Manlove argues how children's fantasy in England has largely been concerned with 'broad patterns of behaviour that have guided humanity to its best achievements,' and while he observes in post-1950s fantasy literature a growing insecurity about moral ideals, he relates the immense popularity of Rowling's texts to her depiction of 'school life...founded on a social structure and values no longer to be found in the outside world' (201). A number of fantasy texts, as Pat Pinsent demonstrates, precede Rowling's texts in using the metaphor of magical education (Pinsent, "Education"). Texts like *The Worst Witch* books and *Groosham Grange* both involve the protagonists Mildred and David, respectively, attending schools where they are taught magic, with each book covering one school term (Murphy, *Witch*; Horowitz, *Grange*).¹³ *Harry Potter*'s narrative focus on a hero who is 'chosen' by a prophecy, guided by authority figures who disclose the mechanisms of the magical world to him, where he must learn enough about

¹³ Rowling's use of her school as a magical academy, part of the tradition discussed, allows her to literalise and reinforce certain school story tropes in her texts. While the school story emphasises the importance of camaraderie, loyalty, and a respect for tradition as markers of moral value, the metaphor of magic in *Harry Potter* is used to portray such values being enforced directly by the mysterious presence of a magical force. This strategy, and Hogwarts' functioning as an ideological state apparatus, is analysed in Chapter 1.

magic to complete a series of missions building up to a final confrontation with his nemesis, are common strategies in portal and quest fantasies, both English and American.¹⁴ Further, a fantasy world where magic as an elite body of knowledge demarcates the powerful from those who are excluded from it are also features of popular texts.¹⁵ Rowling inherits these narrative strategies she employs in her books from this tradition of fantasy literature in English.

By analysing these strategies, I demonstrate the ideological construction of moral messages disseminated in the texts, which have resonated with a remarkably large number of readers on a global scale, in turn illuminating the neoliberal emphasis on niceness and moral complacency which comprise these globally celebrated notions in the books. The global popularity of *Harry Potter* is an important motivator behind my research, following Jack Zipes' argument that 'it is exactly because the success of the *Harry Potter* novels is so great and reflects certain troubling socio-cultural trends that we must try to evaluate the phenomenon' (*Sticks* 172). It is important to examine the books, and their

¹⁴ These texts provide relevant counterpoints to Rowling's books because of their similar ideological structure and use of portal-quest fantasy strategies. Some of these books structure a fantasy world where the heroes' future is fixed by destiny, and they must subject themselves to a long process of training until they can face their final challenge (Eddings, *Prophecy*; Brooks, *Shannara*). Rather than a true *bildungsroman*, guided by truly introspective intellectual maturity, the hero's journey in such books is more concerned with his internalisation of a set of principles and a rationale, which have been prefixed for them by traditional authority. This transformation, as well as the vision of triumph as a preservation rather than reformation of the traditional hierarchy (Lewis, *Lion*; *Battle*), are strategies used by Rowling to reinforce a conservative, innately hierarchical neoliberal worldview.

¹⁵ The roots of this hierarchy are depicted in a variety of ways in different books. For example, *The Eye of the World* (1984) portrays a fantasy world where magical power or "channelling" is derived from semi-divine sources, both good and evil (Jordan). Other books, such as Jonathan Stroud's works, explicitly construct worlds where the hierarchy between magical elites and the non-magical underclass is maintained through political coercion (*Bartimaeus*). This latter example employs a number of narrative strategies derived from dystopian fiction, which portrays corrupt, oligarchic worlds where evil derives from the hierarchy itself (Zamyatin; Orwell). Rowling distances herself from possible interpretations of her magical world as dystopian by portraying the wizard/muggle difference as ontological, rather than racial or political disenfranchisement. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter 1, this allows her to portray evil as emanating not from the hierarchy, but abuse of hierarchical power.

ideological messages, in the light of this extraordinary worldwide reach and impact. Very few contemporary texts of children's fantasy, and more broadly, children's literature, have enjoyed as much commercial success, or had as substantial an impact on global popular culture, as Rowling's *Harry Potter* books. As of June, 2020, the seven books in the series have been translated into 80 languages all over the world, and have sold more than 500 million copies, remaining in the New York Times best-selling children's series list for 587 months consecutively ("Children's", *Times*). Iver B. Neumann and Daniel H. Nexon argue that 'the extraordinary international success of the Harry Potter books, films, and merchandise makes the franchise a ripe subject for scholarship of world politics' (2). The popularity of the books makes them significant cultural artefacts of global importance, which offers the room to analyse *how* the books construct ideologically driven moral messages which resonate with a vast, international readership.

This global importance has inspired a large amount of scholarly work into Rowling's books. A number of critics have explored the possible reasons behind the popularity of the books.¹⁶ Many critics have discussed these ideological messages disseminated in Rowling's books, focusing on

¹⁶ Critics have located different factors behind the unprecedented success of Rowling's books. Catherine Butler analyses the plot itself, arguing that the 'accessible style, humour, twisty but comprehensible plots and ability to people her world with vividly sketched characters' ("Fantasy" 232). Another perspective, exemplified by Giselle Liza Anatol's research, has pinpointed the social realism of the texts as central to their popularity, in terms of offering narratives which 'allow children to identify with a character who triumphs even though he, like them, appears powerless' ("Introduction" xiii). Other scholars have identified the commercial factors of the book market itself, positing the accessible medium of the novel (Goff 27-44) and Warner Brothers' subsequent creation of the *Harry Potter* brand as reasons behind the global popularity (Aquino, "Message").

perspectives ranging from cultural analysis,¹⁷ feminist criticism,¹⁸ uses of language,¹⁹ to constructions of identity.²⁰ Critics including Maria Nikolajeva and Jack Zipes have pointed out that the triumphant victory of good over evil in *Harry Potter*, despite its narrative optimism, ultimately fails to bring about any true, fundamental or radical transformation in the worldview of the narrative. Such assessment locates how ‘adult normativity is irreversibly cemented’ in the texts, and that agency and self-expression of the child characters are depicted as ultimately circumscribed and regulated by adult socio-political supervision and maintenance of social structures (Nikolajeva 25; Zipes, *Sticks* 171-189).²¹ My thesis builds on this existing research to

¹⁷ This mode of scholarship varies from analyses into the cultural influence of post-Thatcher UK on the world-building of the books (Westman 305-328), the reinforcement of class hierarchies as a caste system through the portrayal of elite wizards and inferior muggles (Clifton, “Work” 67-74), and the growing importance of young people as political voices as an influence on Rowling’s depiction of child characters facing up to evil (Barfield 175-198). My thesis frequently draws upon this cultural criticism, and demonstrates these dominant constructions as informed by the principles of neoliberal social life in the books.

¹⁸ As with the feminist criticism of fantasy in general, such scholarship has focused on gender roles and female characters in the books. Hermione is a frequently analysed character, both with regards to how other male characters interact with her (Dresang 211-242), as well as her active engagement in the social dynamics among the three leading characters (Armstrong, “Geometry” 235-250). The importance of maternal figures in the books, and images of motherhood, have also been the subject of feminist scholarship (Weiss 19-32). I draw upon such scholarship in demonstrating how gender roles are depicted to portray certain visions of social relationships, as well as offer a problematic view of consent in the books.

¹⁹ Language is an important aspect of Rowling’s books, both in naming characters and places, and structuring a language of magic. I discussed in Section 2.2 how scholars have analysed the significance of names in *Harry Potter*. Other scholars have analysed the implications of translating the books, how much of the linguistic significance can be preserved across languages (Jentsch 285-301), and the communicative importance of the linguistic styles used by Rowling (Behringer et al. 141-154). I discuss in Chapter 1 how certain words like “squib” or “muggle,” as well as contrasting descriptive adjectives, are deliberately used to assign certain value judgments to classes of characters in the books.

²⁰ The question of identity, especially magical versus non-magical identity, is important to my research, and I draw upon existing scholarship into the portrayal of Harry’s identity as a member of the magical elite (Swanson 95-112), as a hero-in-progress who develops into a full member of the wizardly world (Pharr, “In Medias” 53-66), and the role of masculinity in shaping the identity of an autonomous magic user (Cothran 123-134).

²¹ Other scholars have focused on specific instances where these social structures are visible as problematic and restrictive of genuine freedom. Susan Hall has examined how Rowling’s magical world often functions according to legal and political principles which are overtly unjust and irrational (“Law” 147-162). Others analyse the stultifying effect of Rowling’s class structure, which offers little to no mobility for the disenfranchised (Ostry 89-102; Park, “England” 179-190). I build on such scholarship, and add to the findings by demonstrating how Rowling employs certain ideological strategies to normalise these discrepancies, and explain away any ambiguities through a fundamentally mysterious vision of magic.

demonstrate that this lack of any radical change to the fundamental inequality of the fantasy world is a symptom of a passive neoliberal ideology which precludes the possibility of any change in the status quo, because it is the structure of the status quo itself which allows moral, autonomous action to exist in the first place. Mark Fabrizi identifies in the narratives the ‘manipulation of a population through fear, preservation of hegemonic control through institutionalized oppression, and framing moral choices through a long view that ignores small evils done along the way’ (5). Although the essays in Fabrizi’s volume approach these themes in *Harry Potter* from a Machiavellian perspective, I shall demonstrate how these features, especially the issues of hegemonic control and framing moral action in a long view, are integral to the functioning of neoliberal governmentality.²²

In demonstrating the neoliberal roots behind the moral ideology of Rowling’s books, I build on existing scholarship by linking the narrative strategies used in the books with contemporary cultural and economic criticism. While literary criticism, as discussed, has identified the conservative vision of morality in *Harry Potter*, there has been no sustained analysis of how this conservatism is a politically and culturally specific feature of the late 20th century neoliberal values disseminated in the books. My analysis offers a fresh approach to understand how such an ideology not only constructs a conservative, superficial model of moral action, but also portrays it as positive,

²² Governmentality is a key term I shall use often in my thesis. My working definition of the term is guided by Michel Foucault’s analysis of governmentality. Jeff Sugarman defines the Foucauldian understanding of governmentality as the ‘features and functions of sociopolitical institutions that shape and regulate the attitudes and conduct of individuals...link[ing] political power to subjectivity.’ (Sugarman 104; Foucault, *Biopolitics*)

celebratory, and optimistic through certain narrative strategies. Despite the ‘inherently conservative and hierarchical notions of authority’ which underline the morals of *Harry Potter*, the affective and narrative visions have been popularly interpreted as attractive, positive and emancipatory” (Mendlesohn, “Crowning” 181). Indeed, commentators like Rebecca Knuth have celebrated the texts’ depiction of ‘autonomy in facing the temptations of power and cruel impulses, including... racism and economic and social elitism’ (170). As Charles Sarland comments, ‘research into the meanings that young people actually make of the books they are reading demonstrates the plural nature of the texts we are dealing with’ (51). The plural nature of *Harry Potter* comprises an uneasy combination of triumphant visions of the banishment of evil with the perpetuation of a stultifying status quo discussed in the previous paragraph, supported by the portal-quest fantasy construction of ‘only one understanding of the world: an understanding that validates the quest’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 13). This narrative strategy is similar to the neoliberal popular discourse which makes claims for an inherently hierarchical world, which cannot be fundamentally changed or understood in any other manner (Littler; Sugarman 104-106). An analysis of *Harry Potter* as a neoliberal text therefore demonstrates how such a narrative strategy provides an efficient vehicle for the transmission of contemporary, capitalist value systems.

In this authoritative insistence upon a fantasyland where inequality has always been (and shall continue to be) present, *Harry Potter* draws upon the growing power of cultural myth-making which constructs an optimistic vision of individual triumph. Joseph Campbell identifies in his work on creative

mythology this ‘distinguishing feature of the new mankind’ in the late 1960s (just preceding, not altogether coincidentally, the worldwide shift towards a neoliberal political economy), as ‘a mankind of individuals, self-moved to ends proper to themselves’ (*Mythology* 575). Rowling draws deeply upon this cultural idea in constructing a fantasy hero as a neoliberal individual par excellence. Mendlesohn analyses the moral message of the books which suggests that ‘as long as the “proper” people are in charge, justice will be achieved without social upheaval or divisiveness’ (“Crowning” 181). My thesis, and in particular the last two chapters, shall demonstrate how the narrative uses strategies and thematic modes to construct a fantasyland where ‘proper people being in charge’ is depicted as the only rational model of moral action. Rowling achieves this by making individual acts of niceness the basis of morality, thereby structuring the morality of society on nice people occupying positions of power. Such a narrative strategy has a pervasive ideological motivation; while the overt narrative denial of agency, and an explicit presence of ideology discussed with reference to Hollindale earlier, could ostensibly come across as didactic and stifling, the reconfiguration and ‘displacement...onto emotional registers’ (Berlant 222) of autonomy and freedom conceals at the narrative level these contingencies. This strategy perpetuates a cultural complacency about the moral model of niceness.

This individual niceness of Harry as hero, avoiding any introspection into the hierarchical source of his power, is portrayed as the guarantor of moral balance. Rowling portrays this using the strategy of quest fantasy which depends on the idea that the hero’s ‘certainty is enormously attractive because it reinforces established views of the way the world is’ (Hourihan 57). Since

the way the world is remains unchangeable and fundamentally fixed, this vision of moral action denies the possibility of praxis.²³ My research will demonstrate that the texts construct appealing narratives of empowerment and freedom by depicting magic as a ‘mysterious’ force governing all action, and shifting moral action to the sphere of atomised individual effort. While scholarship on the books has analysed the problematic moral and hierarchical notions present in the texts, my thesis demonstrates that these problems are symptoms, developing out of an ideology which is specifically rooted in contemporary neoliberalism, where economic principles of self-interest and individual autonomy begin to influence personal, social, and moral action.

3. Context: Neoliberalism, and the Metaphor of Magic

My thesis demonstrates that Rowling uses the metaphor of magic as the primary form of power to construct her fantasy world as a neoliberal hierarchy. Two fundamental concepts must thus be clarified before any exploration into this construction. These concepts are: what neoliberal ideology comprises, and what the metaphor of magic as fundamentally mysterious implies in the books. Firstly, I shall discuss the ideological conception of the modern neoliberal individual as a *homo economicus* driven by self-interest. Moral action, as I shall demonstrate, is shifted in this conception from radical, socio-economic considerations to the performative sphere of compensatory niceness. My aim here is to provide working definitions for the terms *homo economicus* and

²³ My use of this term draws from the Marxist understanding of praxis as radical and practical transformation of underlying structures, rather than a contemplative view of change as contained within the existing structure, an idea posited by Ludwig Feuerbach which Marx critiques (Marx and Engels, *Feuerbach* 569-571).

compensatory niceness, which I refer to throughout my thesis. Secondly, I shall discuss the notion of spontaneous philosophy with reference to the metaphor of magic in the books. The idea of an invisible hand subtly governing individual action without overtly manifesting itself is common to both neoliberal socio-economic ideology and *Harry Potter*'s depiction of magic. As I shall demonstrate, the invisible hand is depicted in the books largely through the construction of magic in quasi-religious terms. This discussion shall provide a working definition for the invisible hand I refer to in my thesis.

As the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the neoliberal reconfiguration of moral action as problematically individualistic in the texts, it is necessary to clarify what I refer to in my thesis as 'moral.' Moral action and morality are difficult to define comprehensively, as a number of definitions exist, depending on the perspective of investigation. For my analysis, I shall be focusing on an expressivist understanding of morality, put forward by scholars like Alan Gibbard, Timothy Sprigge, and John Skorupski. This view examines notions of good and evil as sociological constructs primarily developing out of personal, emotional impulses of guilt, shame, or contentment regarding one's actions.²⁴ This view is further reinforced in the books by an advocacy model of morality, where authority figures are often employed to offer moral ideals for the child characters to emulate without much questioning.²⁵ I argue that these are the

²⁴ This perspective interprets morality as primarily governed by affective impulses or feelings (Sprigge, "Judgment" 301-322; Skorupski 121-144; Gibbard). Such a model is best suited to analyse *Harry Potter*, where as I shall demonstrate, morally good action is depicted largely in terms of personal emotional response to situations, and acts of compensatory niceness.

²⁵ This view of morality posits that moral action depends on either direct advocacy from trusted figures or sources of moral authority, whether religious or secular (Gert, *Morality* 7-25), or apprehensions of how one is going to justify his/her actions to social peers (Darwall). As I shall discuss, specifically in Chapters 3 and 4, social relations in the books are often portrayed in terms of reciprocal justifiability between

more superficial models of moral behaviour which Rowling portrays in her texts. These modes lack real introspection into the roots of inequality, and are governed by an insulated, individualistic autonomy. This separates them from the more philosophically insightful model of normative or consequentialist models of moral action, which are closer to an understanding of ethics.²⁶

3.1. Neoliberalism: *Homo Economicus* and Compensatory Niceness

The term neoliberalism is most widely associated with the socio-economic policies of President Ronald Reagan in the United States (1981-1989) and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom (1979-1990).²⁷ In the United Kingdom, neoliberal policies continued to dominate the political economy well after the end of Thatcher's reign. Karin Westman argues that Rowling's depiction of the United Kingdom as the setting for her narratives suggests that 'the world of the novels is set in the same historical time as the government of John Major, Thatcher's "ideological soulmate"' (307), although I argue that her construction of wizardly England itself is heavily influenced by the political economy of the 1970s. It is the administration led by Tony Blair's New Labour government (1997-2007), of course, which spans the entire decade in which all seven of Rowling's books were published. Marxist critic Robert Pfaller argues that, despite their political allegiance to the 'social-

characters who form communal ties with each other. This form of morality dominates the depictions of good characters as opposed to bad ones.

²⁶ This model of moral behaviour interprets the origins of moral action in collective contracts between human beings based on a philosophical rationale of what comprises good action (Smart, "Utilitarianism" 344-354). This vision of morality depends not on external, superficial impulses, but on a philosophical investigation of ethics itself (Rawls, *Justice*).

²⁷ A concise report of this socio-economic regime is offered in *A Very Short Introduction to Neoliberalism* (Roy and Steger).

democratic left,' the New Labour administration functioned as 'even more radical neoliberal reformers' (1). Thus, the decade over which *Harry Potter* was published continued to see the proliferation of a 'socially liberal variant of neoliberal meritocracy' (Littler 87). It is therefore necessary to investigate the major cultural notions that proliferated under neoliberalism, which provide the socio-political and economic context in which Rowling's fantasy was published.

Neoliberal political economy is characterised by policies privileging free market, free trade, and an emphasis on the autonomy of the individual as a rational and self-expressing agent with independence of choice (Roy and Steger 10-32). This notion of choice as the primary marker of individual identity is crucial in the functioning of neoliberal political economy, and has found itself expressed in a new socio-cultural conception of individual identity primarily in terms of being consumers acting out of self-interest. This cultural reconfiguration, which influenced social definitions of important concepts such as autonomy, morality, and empowerment, is in turn involved in the dominant political economy or governmentality; a system of discourses and practices which re-organise individuals as subjects within a category of socio-political values that facilitate the functioning of the dominant economic and political institution (Foucault, *Biopolitics* 13-16).

This emphasis on choice and self-interest under neoliberalism re-defines individual identity in terms of the *homo economicus*, the rational actor who does not merely exercise choice and autonomy in itself, but as a subject

‘capable of choosing rationally and responsibly in ways that will bring about...self-chosen ends’ (Sen, *Ethics* 13).²⁸ It is in this conception of individuals as rational subjects guided by self-interest that neoliberalism differs from classical models of liberal political economy. While in the latter model, individuals were conceptualised as selling their labour as commodity, neoliberal ideology propagates the notion of individuals as commodities or brands in themselves.²⁹ This has had deeply pervasive effects on re-organising individual psychological and social concerns along the lines of economic principles. While neoliberalism is largely considered as a specific economic vision, my thesis is concerned with the psychological and moral effects of neoliberal ideology in cultural narratives. My primary methodological tool, therefore, is existing cultural criticism of the moral effects of neoliberal rationale.³⁰ This concept of the *homo economicus*, at its core, redefines moral and productive action as entirely guided by individual considerations of self-interest, precluding almost entirely the possibility of engagement with the underlying unequal status quo within which such individuals are to function. I demonstrate that this neoliberal conception is to a considerable extent the ideological driving force behind the depiction of moral action in *Harry Potter*.

²⁸ This rationale of self-interest, however, is not an organic one which develops uniquely from an individual’s specific attributes. Instead, it is a set of choices and principles which the ideal neoliberal subject internalises and subsequently misrecognises as his/her own rationale (Persky 221-231). I demonstrate in Chapters 1 and 2 how this internalisation is structured in *Harry Potter* in terms of the child character’s magical education.

²⁹ My analyses of labour as commodity, the consumer market, and the institutional processes which re-organise individual identity in terms of the *homo economicus* are largely Marxist in their critical methodology.

³⁰ This scholarship focuses on the reconfiguration of moral ideas along individualistic neoliberal self-interest (Sugarman 104-107; Sennett 11-67), as well as the replacement of organic, social collectivism by commodity-centric transaction in post-1970s capitalist culture (Hamilton, “Observations” 54-59, 76). Additionally, the seminal work of Professor Amartya K. Sen has been fundamental to my demonstration of how self-interest in Rowling’s books is subtly fixed by external factors, and internalised by characters. I draw upon his text on the shifting ethical concerns in a modern capitalist economy (*Ethics*), as well as his nuanced examination of what ‘rationality’ under neoliberalism actually comprises (“Fools” 317-344).

Rowling mirrors the neoliberal worldview in her conception of the fantasy world, and uses the metaphor of magic and a fixed hierarchy to prescribe self-interested, individualistic action as the moral model, over any possibility of collective change. This helps reconfigure the complacent neoliberal vision of niceness and philanthropy as morally sufficient action, and allows *Harry Potter* to act as an efficient cultural vehicle for the transmission of neoliberal values.

This complacency, as I demonstrate, derives from the conception of moral action as essentially individual. Configuring moral action as driven, like everything else, by the *homo economicus*' self-interest, ensures that the only scope left for a model of morality is one based on compensatory, individual niceness towards others. This moral action is driven by the ethos of 'neoliberalism [as] not so much antisocial as it is privately social, located exclusively in the domain of the interpersonal, apart from public policy and institution' (Bramen 330).³¹ This 'privately social' model comprises a behavioural code of performative acts of niceness towards others, derived from an individual expressivist feeling of emotional gratification, rather than moral introspection (Gibbard). Compensatory niceness, closer to codes of etiquette rather than productive moral action, plays a significant role in regulating and restricting the possibility of class conflict in a hierarchical neoliberal society. 'Niceness provides social compensation for deep structural inequalities without ever questioning the source of these inequalities,' Carrie Tirado Bramen argues, 'it operates as a behavioral Band-Aid in order to sustain the status quo'

³¹ Closely related to this idea of niceness are the performative roles of charity and philanthropy in contemporary capitalist society. Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor analyse in their 2009 book the displacement of the notion of kindness from its internal, moral motivation to an external register of superficial performance to reduce (rather than contend with) class resentment (*Kindness*).

(336). Social compensation, rather than economic introspection, is offered by Rowling as the medium of moral action in her texts.

This medium is very much a part of popular, liberal activism, particularly in societies where cultural practices have been influenced significantly by neoliberal ideology. Socialist critic Robert Pfaller notes how, since the 1980s, mainstream leftist politics and activism underwent a significant global shift towards the ‘cultural,’ where ‘all economic and social concerns were sacrificed for...symbolic “recognition” and “visibility” for [subaltern groups.]’ In combating a perceived threat on the subaltern groups in a hierarchy, such cultural activism is often guilty of ‘insisting on the visibility of these groups...[and] making the problems of these groups permanent’ (1-2), thus falling into the trap of perpetuating the same complacency which neoliberal governmentality employs to maintain that hierarchy. This shift of moral action to the sphere of symbolic recognition, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4 of the thesis, is governed by the individualistic understanding of compensatory niceness as morally sufficient. It is neither accidental nor surprising that *Harry Potter*’s emphasis on compensatory niceness towards one’s inferiors, while accepting the hierarchical structure of superiority/inferiority as a given, is celebrated in popular activism particularly in societies such as USA, UK, or India where neoliberal policies and governmentality have efficiently re-organised popular cultural notions of justice and activism. This is evidenced in the frequent use of tropes and symbols from the books to describe real-world political situations and adversaries. Commenting on the use of *Harry Potter* metaphors in the student protests following the Parkland school shooting in

USA, 2018, for example, Sadie Trombetta observes how ‘the Harry Potter books seem perfectly timed for today’s young readers and the violent, confusing, borderline dystopian world they live in’ (Trombetta). *Harry Potter* provides in its narrative overly optimistic, linguistically charged depictions of the protagonist (as well as other characters) being celebrated for their niceness to inferiors. These narrative images are compatible with and adaptable to the mode of symbolic activism criticised by Pfaller. I shall demonstrate in my thesis that this narrative effect is achieved through a strategy of highlighting a moral spectrum in *Harry Potter*, where morally good characters are portrayed largely in terms of their refusal to abuse their superior position in the hierarchy, and displaying compensatory niceness towards social, economic, and racial inferiors.

What the model of compensatory niceness, in this capacity, achieves is the narrative portrayal of the protagonist Harry, and those allied to him and the morally good side, as claiming ‘for themselves the moral high ground of moderation.’ Rowling’s ethos, to efficiently take this moral high ground, actively distances itself from the extremes of Thatcherism, overtly condemning the materialism and moral decadence of ‘the Dursleys, the epitome of a certain type of aspirationalist Thatcherite shopkeeper/middle class business family’ (Mendlesohn, “Crowning” 167). I build on this identification of the Dursleys as foils by arguing that their negative depiction draws upon their lack of any compensatory niceness. Thus, it is not their aspirationalism itself, but the grotesque visibility of it, which marks them as unpleasant characters in the

books.³² Through this characterisation, Rowling disapproves of a worldview that is overtly ‘hierarchical...and in many ways quite authoritarian.’ However, instead of offering any radical alternative to this vision of the world, the texts celebrate as morally superior what Robert Ellwood dubs a ‘Whig sort of conservati[sm],’ which is defined by its emphasis on the sanctity of the “rugged individualist” acting out of self-interest to assert one’s authority and sovereignty’ (*Myth* 166-167). I shall demonstrate throughout the thesis that Rowling holds up this model of niceness as the narrative marker of who is morally good in her books. The quest narrative of the focalising character’s individual triumph as *homo economicus* serves to conceal the hierarchical structure of the world within which his triumph is made possible. Rowling succeeds in this by employing the strategy of quest fantasy which makes the hero ‘the symbol of an elite,’ whose personal triumph is assumed to resonate unequivocally with the aspirations of his whole society (Hourihan 61).

3.2. Spontaneous Philosophy: Magic as a Metaphor for the Invisible Hand

Besides the concepts of *homo economicus* and compensatory niceness, another key aspect of neoliberal ideology is a philosophical insistence on the permanence and unchangeability of the existing social order or status quo. The claim that the economic life, and subsequently social and individual life of the *homo economicus*, are autonomous yet framed within (and indeed, protected by) the continued presence of the status quo is most famously expressed in the

³² This lack of niceness, and grotesquely visible aspirationalism of the Dursleys, is evidenced from the very beginning of the series, in their overtly undesirable characterisation as a dull, brash, greedy middle-class family (Rowling, *Stone* 7-11).

idea of the ‘invisible hand’ of socio-economic forces, which individual autonomy may engage with, but never be able to control. This is a notion originating in 18th century classical liberal economics, but also perpetuated in neoliberal governmentality (Bishop, *Smith* 165-180). ‘Today,’ explains Jonathan B. Wight, ‘the invisible hand is most commonly said to mean a process by which competitive markets achieve efficiency through a price allocation mechanism’ (“Smith” 352). This rationale is a necessary feature of neoliberal cultural imagination; it criticises government regulation of market activity as authoritarian and unnecessary, suggesting that an ‘invisible’ market force already operates on its own to maintain an equilibrium, and no individual socio-economic activity can function independent of it. In *Harry Potter*, it is Rowling’s metaphor of magic which helps literalise the idea of individual autonomy as contingent upon forces which can never be fully comprehended, and are thus ‘invisible.’

The metaphor of magic as the invisible hand which governs all action in the books succeeds primarily in its depiction as fundamentally mysterious and unknowable. *Harry Potter* offers the reader a contemporary cultural notion of ‘magic which has invaded mass-market media,’ where it is considered ‘powerful precisely because it eludes and exceeds definition’ (Wydant 1). This depiction of magic allows Rowling to construct a hierarchical world where the arbitrary superiority of wizards is given as a common sense truth, which acts as the starting point for all considerations of autonomy and moral action. This hierarchy remains unchallenged, because as Rosemary Jackson argues, a fantasy narrative ‘permits no internal explanation of the strangeness’ of the

world (*Fantasy* 16). Any investigation into the roots of this hierarchy is evaded by the narrative insistence that such answers are governed by magic, and shall therefore elude any definition. Calin Cotoi draws upon Foucault in arguing that the social ‘analytics of governmentality tries...to understand politics as a continuous process of rapport to truth’ (Cotoi 117). I argue in my thesis that the construction of magic is part of a hegemonic ideology, which structures the unequal status quo as a fixed ‘truth.’

This vision of a status quo whose principles are collectively taken as a given, has two important aspects. Antonio Gramsci highlights these as ‘popular religion...in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which surface collectively under the name of “folklore,”’ and the idea of ““common sense” or “good sense”” (*Prison* 626). As a spontaneous philosophy, Rowling’s metaphor of magic is portrayed both in terms of a popular (quasi)religion, and as a common sense starting point to her fantasy world. Firstly, Rowling depicts magic as inexplicable; it is a force which circumscribes all individual action and occasionally intervenes mysteriously in narrative events according to its own laws. This structures magic in the texts, albeit set in a largely secularised world, as a popular religion. Magic is responsible for the existing orderliness of the hierarchy between wizards, muggles, and other magical creatures, as well as for occasional mysterious interventions to redress a perceived breach in the contracts of magical action. This sets up the metaphor of magic as a replacement for a traditional divine source of power. Secondly, the texts largely fix the ‘common sense’ status quo as a starting point for all subsequent moral

inquiry. In other words, the texts provide no narrative scope to explain *why* the magical status quo exists, precisely because magic itself, which structures the hierarchy, cannot be explained. Mendlesohn identifies that in such works of quest fantasy, ‘the hero may argue with the gods, or with the rules of the utopia, but it is assumed that we will accept the paradigms of his argument’ (*Rhetorics* 5). The function of the gods, in *Harry Potter*, is taken up by the invisible hand of magic, a concept which, as discussed, is crucial to the neoliberal governmentality.³³

What this metaphor helps Rowling construct is a worldview where individuals largely understand their autonomy and agency as contingent upon adherence to an underlying status quo, while at the same time concealing at the narrative level *how* the inequality of this status quo came to be by depicting it as abstract, impersonal, and inexplicable. This image of magic, and the magical status quo as eternally fixed, reinforces the contemporary neoliberal model of socio-economic hierarchy, portrayed ‘in popular and political culture by the image of the ladder’ (Littler 2). The moral world of the books, subsequently, is depicted as largely atomised and individualised; good action is necessarily confined to the ‘proper’ people who climb up the ladder, and while it is preferable to have the upper rungs of it occupied by people who will be

³³ The reason why this metaphor of magic is a particularly efficient medium of representing the invisible hand is that the fantastic, as a genre, insists upon the fundamental mysteriousness of the world it constructs. One of the conditions of fantasy, as demarcated by Tzvetan Todorov, is that the fantastic cannot be explained away by ‘allegorical as well as ‘poetic’ interpretations’ (33). The mysteriousness of magic in *Harry Potter* cannot thus be interpreted as a symbolic depiction of an underlying, visible source of authority; the inhabitants of the magical world are required to objectively acknowledge it as something which exists for itself.

benevolent and kind to inferiors, the ladder itself can never be done away with because it is held in place by the invisible hand of magic.

4. Methodology

In examining the neoliberal ideology which *Harry Potter* disseminates, I combine two methodological strategies. Firstly, I use existing critical scholarship on the books to identify the techniques and strategies used to construct the narratives. Secondly, I analyse the ideological effects and implications of such techniques as analogous to neoliberal political discourse. The impact of dominant ideology on the construction of narratives is described by Zipes as cultural homogenisation; the participation of children's texts in 'certain cultural practices' which 'undermine [children's] capacity to develop a sense of morality and ethics and to recognise that their autonomy will be governed by prescribed market interests' (*Sticks* 3). As discussed in the second section, scholarship has examined the stultifying and inadequate moral messages in *Harry Potter* from a number of critical perspectives. My thesis draws upon this research in demonstrating how this moral inadequacy and complacency of the texts are symptomatic of a specific neoliberal political culture which has 'destroyed communities and the self-determination of communities' (Zipes, *Sticks* 3; *Happily*).

As discussed earlier, the critical methodology most suited to my investigation of the books in the context of fantasy is an analysis of the narrative strategies used by Rowling, and the ideological effects of those strategies. I

avoid approaching the seven books as monolithic by identifying that Rowling adapts and develops the thematic and structural features of the series over the decade of publication, and different books employ strategies usually found in different categories of fantasy. The first two books, in particular, do not involve themselves in depicting the politics of magic, and are largely narratives of wish fulfilment. The remarkable volume of detail in building the fantastic world, the elements of puzzle solving and detective work as part of the quest, and the climactic journey of the hero into a secret, magical space to persevere and be rewarded by the reception of the Philosopher's Stone (Rowling, *Stone* 209-214) and the Sword of Gryffindor which kills the monster (*Chamber* 226-237) make these books closed narratives in themselves. These two books employ strategies of the quest fantasy, where the child protagonist is initially ignorant of his magical heritage, but is guided by authority figures who 'promise to induct Harry into an entire universe' and offer him 'enchantment and adventure for the rest of his childhood and beyond' (Cecire 40). Once in the magical world, he must then learn enough about magic (literally taught by older wizards) to 'negotiate with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm' (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 2). Analysis of the narratives from these early books, therefore, identifies them as governed by the structures of portal and quest fantasy, and focuses on Rowling's use of narrative strategies common to this category of literature. As I shall discuss in Chapter 1, it is the earlier texts of the series where the didacticism of Rowling's narrative tone is most overtly visible.

At the same time, I adapt my methodology of analysis in the light of how the themes and motifs adapt and develop as the series progresses. This

development is influenced by two major factors: the growing maturity of the characters, and global political concerns. Rowling depicts her protagonists as maturing in age (and an awareness that the readership is growing up with them) over the course of the series. In contrast to younger, child readers, adolescent reading experience is governed by notions of ‘relevance... independent curiosity, and relatively close attention to textual elements.’ Rowling’s narrative strategy, therefore, adapts to the needs of her maturing readership, and tempers the didacticism of the initial books with instances of active and innovative child characters.³⁴ Moreover, the importance of socio-political relevance in adolescent reading patterns is evidenced by reader response studies which demonstrate how ‘talk about text and life experience was interwoven in constantly braided...strands of relationships’ (Sullivan, *Reader Response* 88). As her readership matures, Rowling therefore introduces more socially relevant and complex depictions of political and social structures.³⁵ My assessment of the portrayal of the political machinations of *Harry Potter*, therefore, shall primarily focus on the later books in the series (*Goblet*; *Phoenix: Prince*; *Hallows*).

The portrayal of socially relevant political figures and events gains further importance following the 9/11 terrorist attack, which transformed the figure of terrorists into ‘consummate objects of fear and hatred,’ figures who ‘perfectly fit the mold of folk devils [who] are unambiguously unfavourable

³⁴ This is a necessary strategy to avoid stultifying the reading experience of more mature readers, as adolescent reading experience is susceptible to resistance and reluctance if the narratives are overtly didactic (Lenters 136-146). Rowling offers images of active participants in magical life to frame her narratives more optimistically, as I shall analyse in Chapter 1.

³⁵ This observation is in keeping with Wolfgang Iser’s assessment of reader response, where he argues that a successful reading experience for young adult readers ‘brings about a standpoint from which the reader will be able to view things’ (35).

symbols' (Muzzatti 12).³⁶ That the UK was deeply influenced by the US attacks is evidenced by Tony Blair's swift adoption of foreign counter-terrorism policies by following the lead of the conservative Republican government in the US (Ahmed, "Pakistan" 36).³⁷ Kylee Hartman-Warren demonstrates how, mirroring the cultural perception of terrorism as a constant threat, from *Order of the Phoenix*, magical 'society organises itself around the constant threat of war,' and the narrative employs 'the Nazi as a Gothic embodiment of a faceless enemy that resembles terrorists in the post-9/11 milieu' (220-221). This narrative shift in depicting moral evil, and the need to sharpen the sense of threat and horror, is demonstrated in the later books' use of strategies from intrusion fantasy. The later novels are dominated by Harry's emotional experience that 'there is always something lurking,' a narrative strategy Mendlesohn describes as latency (*Rhetorics* 116). This is depicted through recurrent images like Harry's scar hurting from the fourth book onwards, offering him glimpses into Voldemort's emotions, but never the full extent of his actions. This strategy is a common rhetoric of intrusion fantasy 'dependent on the evidence of the senses...in which the shiver up the spine is more trustworthy than scientific discourse' (181). Another strategy of intrusion fantasy employed by Rowling is that of escalation, where 'intrusions begin small and often quite distant,' but 'increase in magnitude, in scope, or in the

³⁶ Terrorists have always been imagined as folk devils in popular culture in the UK (Cohn, *Devils*). However, the global influence of Hollywood and US foreign policy immediately following the attacks transformed the figure of the Islamic terrorist into a folk devil who was particularly characterised by his desire to obliterate an entire way of life, and impose an alien, authoritarian regime of tyranny (Kumar and Kundnani 72-83). Rowling's characterisation of Voldemort in the later books, as I demonstrate in Chapter 1, is influenced greatly by this figure of the authoritarian sovereign.

³⁷ The continued radicalisation of young UK citizens by members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria have continued to perpetuate the popular perception of the Islamic terrorist as an absolute "other" who is opposed to the stable, traditional way of English (Western) life (Mullins, "Terrorism" 72-84).

number of victims' (116). The effect of this strategy allows Rowling to build towards the crisis and its final resolution in the last book of the series. To analyse and demonstrate the impact these strategies have on the narrative and its depiction of moral action and autonomy, I shall demonstrate how rhetorical strategies common to intrusion fantasy are employed in the later books.

As discussed, my methodology draws upon cultural and economic criticism to identify the narrative strategies used by Rowling as motivated by specific, contemporary ideological influences. Such a methodology allows me to frame my analysis of *Harry Potter* within the larger context of how a fantasy text provides efficient media to transmit neoliberal discourses. Each chapter focuses on a particular aspect of this ideological strategy, and in the following section I outline my chapter plan.

5. Thesis Overview

My thesis is divided into four chapters concerned with the examination of four narrative strategies: the construction of magic as a discipline, the depiction of the magical market as governed by neoliberal economic ideology, the configuration of social relationships in economic terms of commodity exchange, and the centralisation of compensatory niceness in the portrayal of moral behaviour towards inferiors. The first two chapters demonstrate the manner in which Rowling's narrative strategies define and characterise the metaphor of magic as an invisible hand, which functions as a disciplinary knowledge-system, and subtly regulates all autonomy. Analyses of the

ideological effects of this construction of magic then allow me to demonstrate in the two final chapters how individual, atomised behaviour governs the social relationship between characters. Such a depiction replaces any true moral introspection with acts of token, compensatory niceness which is used to differentiate the good characters from the evil ones. To offer counterpoints to my analyses, I also draw upon other works of fantasy which employ similar strategies of portal, quest, and intrusion fantasy. My selection of texts for comparative analysis is guided by similarity in the categories of fantasy, but also thematic similarities in world-building and ideological motivations. The relevance of texts for comparison is predicated on the use of similar narrative strategies as Rowling's books, as well as similar ideological motivations behind world-building.

In Chapter 1, I argue that magic in *Harry Potter* is constructed as a disciplinary, exclusionary knowledge-system; while there is no explanation in the texts about the exact principles according to which magic works, there is evidence in the narrative that magic's empowering attribute is contingent upon a promise to reveal greater 'truths' about the world than what a non-magical episteme can. For such evidence, my focus here shall be on the images of Hogwarts School, classroom pedagogy, and the house system. The metaphor of magic as empowerment shall be analysed in this chapter; since magic bestows power upon the user, any analysis of the hierarchical structure and morality communicated in the texts must first address *what* this power entails. In this analysis, I shall demonstrate the role of this hegemonic, disciplinary construction of magic as crucial for the depiction of *Harry Potter's* fantasy

world as a hierarchical society, where the privilege of the elite is contingent upon their access to a knowledge-system. It shall also be demonstrated that, to elide investigation into the roots of this hierarchy, the texts employ the ‘mysterious’ definition of magic itself, by depicting the wizard/muggle binary as organic, natural, and inexplicably magical. Such a construction frames a common sense inequality as the starting point for all moral considerations in the books, thus denying the possibility of any moral mode of action other than the individualistic one.

Chapter 2 shall address the depiction of the functional units of neoliberal society: the market and market commodities. I argue here that the portrayal of sentient and conscious magical commodities serves to complicate and interrupt narrative depictions of autonomous action, reinforcing in the narrative a literal magical metaphor for the ‘invisible hand’ of the society which regulates everything according to its own principles and rules. I focus as evidence on the narrative depictions of Diagon Alley, the wand, and the broomsticks as market commodities, and the behaviour of different characters in the narrative with regards to these commodities. The analysis here shall focus on the manner in which Rowling uses the images of these commodities to identify desirable/undesirable behaviour, and the framing of the depiction of individual responsibility and desire around these commodities, which leave certain questions about the construction of such desire unanswered. My analysis here also draws upon existing critical work on the blurring of object/subject barrier, with Bill Brown’s Thing Theory in particular offering a suitable apparatus to demonstrate the idea of everyday objects becoming

‘things’ in their near-magical recalcitrance and resistance to be used in the way they are intended to be as commodities (Brown, “Thing” 1-22; Latour). Such a recalcitrance, as I examine, is literalised through the metaphor of magic. In this chapter, I analyse the author’s construction of emancipatory and appealing visions of freedom, desire, and magical empowerment in terms of economic freedom, which is nevertheless portrayed as contingent upon an underlying economic rationale.

In Chapter 3, I analyse the configuration of social relationships in *Harry Potter* in terms of collection of items, and gift exchange. The focus of this analysis shall be on the images of magical collectibles in the culture of childhood, and the gift culture encouraged at Hogwarts. The embedding of an economic rationale at the heart of observable social behaviour is an important feature of neoliberal governmentality (Sugarman 104-107; Sen, “Fools” 317-344). I shall analyse three narrative devices: the use of collectibles to configure social behaviour as driven by economic rationale; the gift culture at Hogwarts and the categories of gifts Harry gives and receives; and the depiction of ‘bad’ and ‘good’ gifting in terms of who makes monetary matters more visible. This chapter shall analyse how individual moral behaviour, as portrayed in these narrative instances, is configured by the principles of an economic rationale, thus embedding in social relationships the economic image of the *homo economicus*. Throughout this chapter, I shall demonstrate how the narrative depicts the formation of social bonds and social status through images of niceness and gifting. In this depiction,

Rowling constructs the culture of gift-giving as a performative moral model of social solidarity, which functions in compensatory and consolatory terms.

In Chapter 4, I argue that Rowling reframes moral action in terms of compensatory niceness, thus shifting considerations of morals to a largely private, performative space. This shall be evidenced in the depiction of characters who inhabit the margins of magical society. I shall briefly analyse the social behaviour of characters who interact with Hagrid, Remus Lupin, Fleur, and the magical creatures encountered in and around Hogwarts. My primary focus, however, shall be on pets and house-elves, living creatures which are not only marginalised but actively ‘owned’ by wizards in the books. I analyse how the behaviour of different characters regarding the treatment of these marginal and owned living beings offers narrative signposts for the moral superiority/inferiority of those characters. Harry and Voldemort shall be the two primary examples of the moral extremes as depicted in the texts. I analyse the treatment of pets depicted in the books to demonstrate the clear narrative demarcation of narcissistic possession as undesirable, and courteous benevolence and niceness as the moral ideal. I also demonstrate the manner in which Rowling constructs the character of the house-elf as distinct from its literary predecessors such as French folkloric figures and K.M. Briggs’ *Hobberdy Dick* by portraying it as ontologically servile (Briggs, *Hobberdy*). With regard to the treatment of such a creature, I examine the manner in which both overt bigotry and

paternalistic radicalism are depicted as irrational. As I shall demonstrate, performative niceness and benevolence towards one's inferiors are offered as morally desirable modes of behaviour, through the depiction of Harry's interaction with his owl, and with house-elves. The analysis of these narrative models of moral behaviour demonstrates the texts' perpetuation of the contemporary neoliberal cultural notion of compensatory niceness (Bramen 330-332; Phillips and Taylor). This model of behaviour is not a solution for the fundamental inequalities of society, but a consolatory strategy in decreasing class resentment. While existing scholarship, as discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3 of the current chapter, has identified the problematic insufficiency of this moral model in *Harry Potter*, my thesis offers a fresh, sustained demonstration of this insufficiency as a symptom of neoliberal ideology. Such ideological discourse not only constructs, but overtly celebrates this model of moral action as superior and rational.

6. Conclusion

My thesis brings together two critical perspectives. Firstly, it offers a political and economic analysis of the neoliberal emphasis on individualism in cultural perceptions of moral action and autonomy. Secondly, it undertakes a critical analysis of a globally popular work of fantasy which disseminates these ideologically constructed value systems. I demonstrate the strategies used by Rowling to offer a narrative model of moral and autonomous behaviour which is based on economic principles of self-interest, and on compensatory niceness

as a consolatory model of confronting inequality and hierarchical structures. Building on the existing scholarship about the moral inadequacy of the *Harry Potter* books, I demonstrate clearly in my thesis that such inadequacies are not only symptomatic of the neoliberal culture which ‘keeps the motivations of human beings pure, simple and hardheaded, and not messed up by such things as... moral sentiments’ (Sen, *Ethics* 1), but are effectively concealed by Rowling’s use of compensatory niceness which replaces true moral sentiments in the texts by demonstrating good and evil characters largely in terms of how they behave towards their inferiors. This model of moral behaviour portrayed in *Harry Potter* perpetuates a complacency about moral action.

‘Complacency seems an especially common and troubling vice,’ Jason Kawall comments, ‘it is not as easily recognised as cruelty, dishonesty, and those vices which lead to distinctively vicious forms of behaviour’ (343). Rowling strongly and vocally condemns overt acts of cruelty and viciousness, championing instead characters whose morals are built around the quality of niceness. While such a quality is undoubtedly worthy of being offered as a model of behaviour in a story for young readers, structuring moral action *solely* in terms of individual niceness perpetuates a moral complacency which ‘does not cause evil or mediocrity; it allows these vices to exist.’ On the level of popular culture (and, of course, popular children’s literature), complacency is thus more difficult to point out; as a cultural/moral practice, it resides not in active tendencies or judgments, but rather in the passivity of ‘easy self-satisfaction’ (343). The celebration of niceness towards one’s inferiors, while considering their inferiority to be inevitable and inherent, therefore, involves an

‘epistemically culpable overestimate of one’s accomplishments or status’ (347). Such an overestimation is integral to the neoliberal project of disseminating a widespread cultural optimism in the power of the individual, while maintaining the inevitable existence of an underclass regarding whose treatment such models of niceness are to circulate in moral discourse.

My thesis explores Rowling’s use of the metaphor of magic governed by the neoliberal ideology of an unchanging status quo, whose invisible hand transmits, regulates and structures the complacent and subtly contingent portrayals of empowerment, morals, and autonomy. The importance of literature which celebrates autonomy at the narrative level is central to neoliberal culture; as Betty Joseph argues, literary narratives have often been employed to disseminate a new and dynamic neoliberal worldview of individual autonomy which ‘seemingly repairs the split geography of uneven development, class divisions, and political interests by unleashing the forces of entrepreneurship and competition’ (“Neoliberalism” 69). *Harry Potter*’s emphasis on an individualistic morality defined by niceness demonstrates the pervasiveness of neoliberal individualism in shaping popular narratives of moral action, and my thesis demonstrates the strategies used by Rowling to perpetuate such ideological constructions. This research thus highlights and facilitates further analyses into how popular texts for children function as cultural artefacts to disseminate the neoliberal conception of moral action in atomised, competitive, and individualistic terms. This ideological transmission has particularly pervasive influences on adolescent reading experiences, subtly configuring moral and political discourse in terms of the concealed stasis and

complacency the books offer as narrative features (Mertz, “Adolescent” 179-185; Sullivan, “Reader Response” 79-93).

CHAPTER 1: Magic as a Hegemonic, Exclusionary Knowledge-System

Introduction: Chapter Outline

This chapter is an analysis of Rowling's depiction of magic as a hegemonic knowledge system. This system offers its wizard members a socio-politically elite status, by excluding muggles from participating in it. Magical knowledge offers access to greater 'truths' of nature than muggle science, thereby offering greater control of the world. I have discussed in the Introduction how magic serves as a suitable metaphor for the 'invisible hand' in its description as definitionally mysterious. I argue here that this invisibility is maintained by Rowling through a narrative insistence on magic as essentially mysterious. Such a narrative construction conceals any discernible political ideology behind the organisation of magical knowledge. This insistence on the hierarchy as a natural formation, devoid of ideological motivation, is deeply resonant with neoliberal governmentality. Neoliberalism offers its subjects an understanding of the world as organically and inevitably unequal. I draw upon existing cultural criticism to highlight these features of neoliberalism.¹

To analyse Rowling's portrayal of this inequality as natural, I use the critical methodology developed by the structural Marxist Louis Althusser on the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). These apparatuses are 'distinct and specialised institutions' which coerce subjects to comply with and accept the dominant ideological narratives. Such coercion is accomplished not by visible

¹ The hierarchical structure of neoliberal governmentality, a concept fundamental throughout my thesis, has been analysed in terms of its pervasive reconfiguration of social relations (Sugarman 104-107), its displacement of individual rational behaviour onto a register of internalised ideology (Sen, *Ethics* 22-56), and its insistence on the inevitably 'ladder-like' structure of society, where some people will definitionally remain inferior (Littler 3-21).

repression or violence, but through manipulation and the presentation of ideologically motivated messages as ‘common sense truth’ (Althusser, *Reproduction* 243-245).² Analysing how Hogwarts School in the books functions as an ISA, I argue that Rowling uses the depiction of wizardly school life to transform child characters into interpellated subjects. Such subjects subscribe to the hegemony of the wizard/muggle hierarchy, without questioning how or why this inequality came to exist. The main aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how Rowling portrays magic as a knowledge-system governed not by any visible political sovereignty, but an impersonal, hegemonic discipline.

In this function, Rowling draws greatly from the British school story tradition. John Baxendale argues that with the publication of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857), the British school story genre became centrally concerned with the education of young men into ‘the Arnoldian ideal of the Christian gentleman,’ and underwent a ‘decisive shift towards meritocracy in the selection and training of future rulers’ (Baxendale 228-229).³ This selection and training of young boys into ideal subjects of the future forms a crucial part of the school story, where the institution serves as an ISA to hegemonically interpellate students. However, Rowling’s use of Hogwarts not only as a school but a magical one helps literalise this hegemonic authority. Thus, while school stories

² Althusser’s analysis has been applied to contemporary education systems by cultural critics. Existing scholarship argues that in educating students, schools serve both a manifest and a latent function; “schools as institutions...embody collective traditions and human intentions which, in turn, are the products of identifiable social and economic ideologies” (Apple and Apple 43). It is this ideology that I identify in this chapter as a neoliberal one, which governs Rowling’s portrayal of the school.

³ The school story, as notably critiqued by early 20th century critic J.A. Hobson, demonstrated the ideological motivation of the school to “capture the childhood of the country, to mechanise its free play into the routine of military drill, to cultivate the savage survivals of combativeness” (217). As I demonstrate in Section 1, Hogwarts in this regard functions to transform its students into disciplined bodies or subjects. Rowling draws from a tradition of school stories as narratives of disciplining young boys into loyal subjects to the dominant social ideology (Richards, *Happiest* 103-119; Mack 15-25).

prioritise the importance of fixed, historical tradition, where ‘conforming to the discipline of the schools depends on innate characteristics that are in themselves unchangeable’ (Bristow 73),⁴ Rowling’s use of magic lets her portray *literally* unchangeable magical principles. Such principles, as I shall discuss in Section 1.1.1, routinely come to life in the books to intervene and impose school discipline.

I analyse three different narrative strategies employed in the books to demonstrate how Rowling constructs her portrayal of magic as a hegemonic knowledge-system. Firstly, I demonstrate that Hogwarts as an ISA functions to offer veridiction for its subjects (in this case students). Veridiction involves the training of students in ‘an apparatus (*dispositif*) of knowledge-power,’ through the repetition of ‘a set of practices and a regime of truth’ (Foucault, *Biopolitics* 297). These practices comprise the different rituals, conventions, and rules in the magical school. Driven by the historical traditions of the school, these rituals circumscribe the child characters’ magical education.⁵ I argue that this process transforms Hogwarts students from organic, independent individuals to interpellated subjects. Such individuals voluntarily take part in magical life, not questioning the different categories and rules which have already been pre-established for them to follow. This strategy constructs a fantasy world where ‘we can no longer debate history, in the sense of interpretation, analysis,

⁴ The presence of an “unseen but all-seeing vigilance,” where the authority figures take on a somewhat panoptical position of discipliner, characterises much of post-*Tom Brown* school story literature (Dingley 4; James, “Imperialist” 89-99). For Rowling, this vigilance can be portrayed as far more efficient; in her magical school, the sentient castle itself keeps a watch on the students, structuring a perpetual panopticon which does not depend on the individual effort of teachers to function.

⁵ These traditions are derived from history, and as with the traditional school story, serve to acculturate the child characters by appealing to a sense of honour and duty to tradition (Winn 64-73; Puccio 57-74). As I shall demonstrate, Rowling offers her child characters magical incentives for loyalty towards tradition by depicting them as *literally* competing against each other according to the vibrant, historical presence of ancient magic in the school.

discovery; we can only relate the past' (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 15). Rowling builds on the school story tradition, where schools 'would monitor as they see fit the exercise of [the student's] body while keeping a watchful eye on him to guarantee moral control' (Bristow 58-59). Her depiction of Hogwarts itself as a magical space allows her to take this control further by literally portraying magic and magical history as physically intervening and regulating the everyday activities of her students.

Secondly, I argue that these interpellated subjects are then allowed to participate in a disciplinary knowledge-system, as analysed in Rowling's depiction of classroom pedagogy. The appeal of magical education lies in its access to a body of knowledge which uncovers greater truths about the world. However, books insist upon the need to adhere to the underlying rules and principles to be able to access this knowledge in the first place. The sources of these rules, however, are pointedly kept invisible. Hogwarts pedagogy is portrayed in terms of offering access to an ever-expanding catalogue of magical information; critical thinking is not part of this magical curriculum. Rowling avoids the depiction of this mode of learning as didactic through the exotic and colourful content of magical education.⁶ The need for allegiance to these underlying rules and principles is insisted on as a model of good pedagogy, while keeping invisible the inner workings of magic itself from any educational concern. This pedagogy, I argue, portrays the accumulation of knowledge as

⁶ Rowling achieves this by introducing increasingly exotic and powerful magical spells and potions for her students to master as school life progresses, from the Polyjuice Potion (*Chamber* 124-125), to the Felix Felicis which imparts infallible luck to the drinker (*Prince* 177-178), to Harry's mastery of two incredibly difficult Unforgivable Curses in the final book (*Hallows* 428, 477). While this is a rational portrayal of students becoming more adept at their magic, it also serves to keep the reading experience, particularly for adolescent readers (Sullivan, "Reader Response" 79-93), vibrant by offering increasingly detailed magical artefacts.

passive. Progressively more about the world is revealed to individuals, while they simultaneously internalise the impossibility of ever fully understanding magic. Embedded in the optimistic vision of exotic, magical education, Rowling impresses the importance of obeying authority.

Having demonstrated the role of Hogwarts in portraying magic as a system which can be participated in, the final section focuses on the ideological implications of this structure. I argue that Rowling uses this invisibility to justify exclusion. She uses the fixed, organic image of magic to avoid addressing any possible motivations behind the exclusion of the muggle underclass. The narrative suggests that rather than being politically disenfranchised or racially separate, the lack of magical ability in muggles is ontological, determined by the impersonal principles of magic itself. But these principles, as Hogwarts pedagogy insists, are mysterious, unexaminable, and thus taken as common sense.⁷ As a result, any social relationship between wizards and muggles is obliged to take this hierarchy as given. Because muggles are constructed as the natural inferiors to wizards, good wizards morally justify acting upon them to protect them from abuse at the hands of evil wizards. Such a moral mode is problematic in its deeply individualistic, elitist aspect. It is informed by the neoliberal paternalism of perceiving an inevitable underclass who are only fit to be ruled and protected.⁸ I argue that Rowling's mode of moral action is guilty of

⁷ In the school story, which Rowling draws upon, these unknown, semi-divine principles are understood to have already set the playing field within which individual students must exercise their autonomy and act morally. William E. Winn comments that 'a moral struggle takes place at every point' of school life as depicted in this genre, one whose moral 'sides' are fixed by theological authority (69). Rowling uses the image of an omnipresent magical force to sustain this theme of fixed categories of morality which derive from the authority of an unseen force, despite the secular setting of her school story.

⁸ The inevitability of the underclass is a fundamental aspect of neoliberal governmentality (Little 3-21). It creates a caste-based perception of social meritocracy, where talent or ability is crystallised in popular culture as effects of one's ontological nature, discounting the educational, economic, and opportunity-based conditions which configure individual ability. Existing cultural analyses, particularly caste

epistemic violence. In acting upon muggles, but silencing the muggle voice regarding whether they wish to be acted upon at all, her magical world functions through the violation of consent.⁹

This three-part analysis demonstrates how Rowling constructs magic in her books as a knowledge-system, which empowers the user with greater ontological knowledge (and thus control) of the natural world. Simultaneously, this system governs the individual use of magic through an invisible hand, which remains definitionally mysterious. This vision of the world helps naturalise the wizard/muggle hierarchy. The ideological impact of this is the elimination of any narrative rationale in questioning *how* inequality comes to be. The hierarchy, instead, is presented as unarguable. This strategy helps Rowling disseminate the dominant neoliberal view of social life, where ‘the actual existence of social divisions is...explained by identifying certain divisions as *the boundaries of society itself*’ (Gopalakrishnan 2805).

criticism in the Indian subcontinent, demonstrate the neoliberal roots of this ideology (Teltumbde; Ambedkar 10-38).

⁹ The most notable events in Rowling’s books which expose this epistemic violence are Voldemort’s tortures of muggles without any consideration for the latter’s humanity (*Goblet* 108-110; *Hallows* 17-18). However, even the actions of benevolent wizards for the muggles’ own well-being are guilty of not securing consent first, as evidenced in the enchantment of Mr. Roberts which leaves him mentally disturbed (*Goblet* 130). I shall demonstrate that morally responsible wizards are portrayed not by their rejection of epistemic violence, but their individual justifications in exercising it.

1.1. Hogwarts as Ideological State Apparatus: Magic as Hegemony

1.1.1 The Function of Schools as ISAs

In all modern societies, political empowerment (and its inevitable counterpart, disempowerment) is regulated and structured by the dominant political institutions of the society in question. To analyse magic as a system which offers empowerment, it is first necessary to investigate what institutions regulate and disseminate magic in *Harry Potter*. Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Brian Folker do not address the importance of this institutional aspect when they contend that ‘power in the magical world ultimately derives from the individual’s own innate capacities.’ In their assessment, magic ‘does not appear to derive from the pooling of those capabilities into institutional governing structures’ (115). This assessment is based on their analysis of the Ministry of Magic, ‘not a particularly powerful entity,’ as the administrator of the magical state (114).¹⁰

They do not, however, analyse the other institutional governing structure which functions in the books as *the* site of magical training and education, dependent precisely on the ‘pooling of [magical] capabilities’ in terms of pedagogy, training, and offering access to magical knowledge- the school (114-115). Hogwarts, and not the Ministry of Magic, is the central narrative locus of

¹⁰ This assessment can be challenged with evidence from the books which show the Ministry’s regulatory power which occasionally intervenes in wizardly school life. The most important instances that Rowling provides are the Ministry’s power to expel Hogwarts students (*Chamber* 21-22), and their surveillance of underage wizards through a magical tracking mechanism called the Trace (*Hallows* 45). However, as I shall demonstrate, direct political control is usually portrayed as undesirable in the books, because the invisibility of the regulating principles is paramount to the smooth functioning of the ISA.

magical education and empowerment. As discussed in the previous section, Rowling draws upon the tradition of the British school story in portraying the school as an ISA. Don Randall argues how the school narrative ‘inscribes attitudes, values, codes of conduct that, ostensibly, can be transported to the distant and distinct contexts of the empire’ (164). Hogwarts certainly prepares young children to become productive subjects of wizardly culture, as is evidenced in the claim that ‘every witch and wizard in Britain has been educated at Hogwarts’ (*Hallows* 173). Hogwarts, therefore, is an institution where almost every magical individual in the country spends the formative years of their life. Their training includes not only magical education, but also familiarising themselves with the cultures, etiquettes, and accessories of British magical life.¹¹

This acculturation is dominated by the specific neoliberal ideology of individuals as competitors. Traditional school stories do insist that ‘fitness, above all, would strengthen the empire,’ and such fitness is often expressed in the form of masculine competitions or feats of skill (Bristow 66). However, Rowling chooses to make competition and inter-house rivalry the *fundamental* aspect of social life at school.¹² This interpellation of subjects as essentially and inherently competitive sets her narrative apart from earlier school stories in transmitting an overtly neoliberal worldview. How her narrative achieves such

¹¹ Notable examples of these acculturations in the books are the insistence on the centrality of Quidditch to social prestige (Rowling, *Stone* 112-114), the internalised loyalty to and rivalry between to houses (*Goblet* 249-250, 257), the traditional Yule Ball as a school-regulated expression of adolescent romantic expression among students (345-369), and the career counselling services where students are directly supervised and offered guidance about the adult job market (*Phoenix* 578-579).

¹² This framing is informed by the neoliberal ideology of configuring individuals as competing units. While classical liberalism insists that human labour is a commodity which can be exchanged in the competitive market, neoliberalism goes further by transforming human identity itself into a competitive product unto its own (Sugarman 104-105).

an interpellation can be efficiently demonstrated through the structural Marxist understanding of the school as an ISA. In this role, the school is involved in transmitting and inculcating in its students dominant ideological messages. Such an institution, Althusser argues, instills in young children a sense of allegiance (or even conformism), ‘by an apprenticeship in a variety of know-how wrapped up in the massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class’ (*Reproduction* 252). Alexandra Mullen identifies the central importance of this apprenticeship in Rowling’s books, where ‘the mythic patterning... is occupied with a young person’s education.’ The aim of this educating process is to train the characters ‘in defining one’s identity in relation to others,’ governed by the dominant ideological constructions of social life (“Schooldays,” 128).

That dominant ideology influences school life is clearly evidenced in Rowling’s books. This is portrayed in how different cultural stances on the acceptability of dark or evil magic influence their school curriculum. While Hogwarts teaches its students how to defend themselves against the dark arts, Durmstrang, a school in Eastern Europe, has ‘students actually *learn* them’ (Rowling, *Goblet* 147). The headmaster of Durmstrang is an ex-Dark Wizard, while Hogwarts headmaster Dumbledore is depicted as hostile to dark magic (510).¹³ The respective ideologies of the headmasters, and through them their cultures, transforms the school into the site of an ideological contrast between two moral positions on good/evil magic. I demonstrate how Rowling shapes the

¹³ Moral identity, to a large extent, is expressed in terms of the character’s allegiance to the school’s official ideology regarding Dark Arts. Harry’s voluntary passion to train himself in advanced magic is depicted as morally charged by a decision to overcome his fear and stand his ground against the evil Dementors (Rowling, *Azkaban* 176-180, 300-301). His moral foil, Malfoy, openly derides Defence Against the Dark Arts, and expresses his personal ambition to train himself in the Dark Arts instead (*Goblet* 146-147). Allegiance to specific ideologies frames the perception of characters as good or evil.

identities of her magical children as subjects, by analysing what dominant ideological messages Hogwarts transmits as an ISA .

There are three broad ways in which Hogwarts acts as an ISA, and functions as the symbolic repository of the dominant ideological value of British magic. Firstly, Rowling depicts the school as a magically sentient **hegemonic** institution, governed by the living presence of its history. Secondly, she portrays the ritual of Sorting which **interpellates** child characters into competitive group identities. Thirdly, she transforms Hogwarts into the site of ideological conflict which rejects the **visible sovereignty** of coercive authorities, and fights to preserve a hegemonic institution, where ideological motivations remain invisible.

1.1.2 Hogwarts, a Hegemony: The Invisible Hand of Magic as ‘Common Sense’

Rowling depicts Hogwarts as a mysterious space, vastly different from the mundane locale of Privet Drive, thus functioning to invoke curiosity in the otherness and the novelty of experience in the secondary world.¹⁴ Clare Bradford posits that medieval settings like manors and castles ‘conjure up past lives and cultures, often incorporating ghostly or magical presences’ in children’s books (64). These magical presences are made manifest through the depiction of Hogwarts as an enchanted castle; the school is not merely a place where magic is taught, but is magical itself. Thus, Harry’s first days at school teach him how ‘it was also very hard to remember where anything was, because it all seemed to move around a lot. The people in the portraits kept going to visit

¹⁴ Harry’s first impressions of the school, for example, are described in terms of his wonder and curiosity about how the school itself is enchanted, and frequently comes to life to surprise students (Rowling, *Stone* 98-104). This contrasts sharply with his miserable life with the Dursleys, described as an experience of perpetual impoverishment and dullness (19-33).

each other, and Harry was sure the coats of armour could walk' (Rowling, *Stone* 98). Rowling structures the castle as a site of the marvellous, where Harry enters to discover that 'unconcerned mixture of different types of lore can be found in Hogwarts, a castle housing' (Petrina, "Castle" 97).

These different types of lore saturate the image of the castle as foreboding, bizarre and mysterious. Harry catches his first glimpse of Hogwarts 'perched atop a high mountain on the other side [of the lake], its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers' (Rowling, *Stone* 83). Rowling draws upon very similar depictions of schools of magic from her literary predecessors, most notably Jill Murphy. The latter's Miss Cackle's Academy for Witches is almost identical in 'its gloomy grey walls and turrets,' which 'stood at the top of a high mountain surrounded by a pine forest... everything about the school was dark and shadowy' (Murphy 1). Hogwarts invokes a sense of wonder, with the books progressively revealing more and more about its secrets. As the books progress, Harry and his peers also get to explore the mysterious places surrounding the school grounds. Both the Forbidden Forest and the Lake are home to exotic and dangerous creatures, and function in a manner similar to Arthurian narratives; they constantly create a sense of marvel (Petrina, "Castle"). This marvellous structuring of the school as 'full of new and incongruous experiences,' Susan Engel and Sam Levin posit, allows Rowling to depict a 'wide-eyed sense of wonder' in Harry's narrative depiction in the first book, as his curiosity becomes the primary motivation in

his quest' (22). Harry is thus constructed as a child driven by his curiosity, yearning to discover more about the magical world he has now entered.¹⁵

In the first two books of the series, the protagonist's curiosity drives most of the narrative action. The quests are centred around Harry who, with help from his companions, progressively discovers more and solves puzzles. He is ultimately rewarded by gaining access to secret places in the school, where he confronts his nemesis Voldemort. The language used in depicting these quests is largely positive, portraying Harry as willingly breaking rules and taking risks to discover secrets about the castle.¹⁶ At the end of each quest, he is rewarded rather than punished for these transgressions. Rule-breaking is the starting point for the quest in the opening book, where at Harry's induction ceremony, the headmaster warns the students that 'the third floor corridor on the right hand side is out of bounds' on pain of death (Rowling, *Stone* 94-95). Despite the high stakes of this warning, it is precisely in their curious investigation of this corridor that Harry, Ron, and Hermione initiate their quest to save the Philosopher's Stone (118-119). Joseph Bristow argues that in the school story, rule-breaking is often tolerated as a necessary means to channel the hero's 'energies away from fighting,' and 'at the same time, to make him ready to fight

¹⁵ This curiosity is maintained as a functional aspect of Harry's development through his discovery of new spaces in every book, from the Forbidden Forest (Rowling, *Stone* 183-190), to the Chamber of Secrets (*Chamber* 222), the Shrieking Shack (*Azkaban* 247-248), the Prefect's Bathroom with its wondrous artefacts (*Goblet* 399), to the Room of Requirements (*Phoenix* 343). His increasing knowledge of the magical world is mapped within his geographical discovery of cumulatively more hidden spaces which the school reveals to him magically.

¹⁶ The authority figure of Dumbledore is the most frequent voice of tolerance and even tacit encouragement of Harry's adventurous nature. He offers no admonitions, instead gently advises Harry in *Philosopher's Stone* during his discovery of the hidden Mirror of Erised (156-157), his journey beneath the trapdoor guarded by Fluffy (199-201), and also in the following book regarding his journey into the Chamber (*Chamber* 243).

in earnest' (63). Rowling draws on this tradition to use Harry's adventures as a necessary expression of his curiosity and autonomy.

This curiosity, expressed through the explorations of the castle, is only possible because the authority figures allow it in the first place. As the children discuss why their rule-breaking has not been punished, Harry rationalises that the headmaster 'had a pretty good idea we were going to try [to break the rules], and instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help' (219). Hogwarts is thus depicted as a site where the protagonist exercises his curiosity in discovering more about the castle. This curious journey frames magical education itself within the navigation of the castle. Depicting this mobility is crucial to the quest fantasy, where 'the hero *moves through* the action and the world stage' (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 9), as also evident in earlier works of the genre like *The Dragonbone Chair*.¹⁷ Here, the protagonist Simon's increasing knowledge of the political machinations of Osten Ard is framed within his discovery of the dungeons and secret passageways of Hayholt Castle, guided by the mage-tutor Morgenens (Williams). The image of the autonomous hero, curiously exploring the ever-expanding magical world, maintains the narrative optimism of the books. Brian Stableford identifies this strategy as necessary to world-building in fantasy, where 'readers can be eased into its details and complexities, while being provided with sufficient narrative momentum' (li). By maintaining the image of active curiosity and discovery, the magical space helps regulate this momentum. Rowling drives Harry's autonomy on this active

¹⁷ *The Dragonbone Chair* provides a productive counterpoint to Rowling's text in its depiction of the hero gaining knowledge as he geographically explores the castle. In both texts, the castle is itself replete with magic and offers a material locus for the intellectual development and historical familiarisation about the worlds the heroes find themselves in.

curiosity, to portray Hogwarts as a repository of hidden knowledge which the hero must discover for himself.

This optimistic narrative vision of Harry as an autonomous discoverer subtly conceals the underlying limits to how much he is allowed to discover. Hogwarts is a sentient magical space, one whose secrets can only be discovered to the extent that the invisible hand of magic *allows* Harry to discover them. This construction is where Rowling differs from the traditional school story, as she portrays the school as a space which is far more efficient and omnipresent in its surveillance of students. In the school story, ‘breaking rules, cheating, sneaking, straying out of bounds, defying masters’ orders... all these ways of testing the limits of the closed societies in which they occur are not only thwarted, often by ingenious means, by the hierarchies of the school but also by the necessities of plot’ (Bristow 60). Rowling weaves into her world-building the idea of Hogwarts having a will of its own. This makes discovery and navigation in the books contingent upon the magical sentience of the school itself. Thus, both the necessities of the plot and the hierarchies of the school function in terms of a magical sentience; the school does not need individual instances of academic supervision to regulate the movement of its inhabitants, it can magically intervene and thwart individual autonomy whenever it deems fit. While Mullen identifies in the books that ‘circumventing rules and punishments forms a large part of a school story lore’ (“Schooldays” 132), the magically sentient school does not require subjective agents to enforce rules and punishments, but acts as a regulator of behaviour itself.

This magical sentience of Hogwarts helps portray the disciplinary role of the school as an ISA as far more pervasive and complete than in non-magical

school stories. Robert Dingley identifies parallels between Rugby School in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and the panopticon, but admits that the headmaster does not entirely concern himself with 'the subjection of his school to a uniform disciplinary regime' (5). Hogwarts, however, *does* function as a uniform, disciplinary regime; it is not limited by the availability of individual surveillance, as the omnipresent force of magic impersonally and sentiently governs the behaviour of students. Hogwarts is thus the perfect panopticon, as it requires little personal effort from the staff to enforce its own will. Further, the mysterious depiction of magic itself suggests that the secrets of the school can never be entirely known. In *Goblet of Fire*, for example, when the headmaster of a rival school asks Dumbledore if headmasters should not be 'proud that we alone know our school's secrets,' the headmaster confesses that he 'would never dream of assuming [he] know[s] all Hogwarts' secrets' (363).¹⁸ The invisible hand of magic at Hogwarts guards its own secrets closely. As demonstrated in the Introduction, neoliberal ideology employs the idea of an invisible hand of the status quo which preserves the present hierarchical structure of society. All individual action is circumscribed by this uncontrollable principle. It is the magical will of Hogwarts which circumscribes all individual actors who navigate the castle.

Stefan Andriopoulos notes that in narratives which employ figures of the mysterious, gothic castle, one 'often encounters an "invisible hand" causing a disjunction between an action's intention and its results' (739). From the very

¹⁸ The figure of Argus Filch, the caretaker, does exist to enforce Hogwarts rules, and frequently patrols the corridors looking for rulebreakers (Rowling, *Chamber* 96). However, he exists as a grotesque comic foil, and is never successful in his efforts to discipline students. Most frequently, he serves to highlight Harry's ingenuity in escaping him and gaining his freedom (*Stone* 118-120; *Goblet* 406-412).

first book, the presence of such an invisible hand is made evident in Harry's discovery that his intention of 'finding his way to classes' could be thwarted or resisted by the magic of the castle itself, where 'there were doors that wouldn't open unless you asked them politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place' (Rowling, *Stone* 98). Rowling portrays the school as not simply the site of magical secrets, but an institution whose geography itself manifests a mysterious will of magic. To navigate that geography, the rules and principles of this will must be adhered to. In the *Half-Blood Prince*, the powerlessness of individuals to uncover secret information has grave consequences. Trying to discover Malfoy's plans, Harry attempts to enter a secret room whose doors only open if one clearly articulates one's true need. However, while Harry offers perfectly logical passwords, the door remains stubbornly shut for him (Rowling, *Prince* 428-429). In his final surrender, Harry acknowledges his lack of power over the invisible hand of magic which prohibits him entry:

Harry tried every variation of 'I need to see what Draco Malfoy is doing inside you' that he could think of for a whole hour, at the end of which he was forced to concede that Hermione might have had a point: The room simply did not want to open for him. (429)

Harry's inability to logically work out a solution to the problem demonstrates that Rowling's magical world is not that of an immersive fantasy, where the characters clearly understand the working principles of their world. In such texts, 'actors must be able to engage with their world; they must be able to scrape its surface and discover something deeper than a stage set' (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 63). Terry Pratchett's *The Colour of Magic* or *The Wyrd Sisters*, are examples of this category of fantasy; 'the Discworld universe is run on magic,

but the magic follows very specific rules, and... can thus be bent and analysed in a scientific manner' (Rana 2).¹⁹ There is no scope for Harry in this episode to analyse his way into the Room. He is thwarted not by his effort to logically find a way, but by the invisible hand of magic which reigns in Hogwarts.

This contingency of autonomy on the invisible hand, which can never be analysed, makes it compulsory to take the principles of magic as eternal and true. The only option left to magical actors is to defer to, rather than discover, this unknowable set of principles. Thus, when Harry's name comes out of the goblet of fire, despite the logical absurdity of having four champions in a *Triwizard* tournament, the authorities decide that they must accept this, as there is a 'binding magical contract' which cannot be disobeyed. This decision is finalised by the magical rules set by the goblet, which are paramount and beyond debate (Rowling, *Goblet* 244). Adult authorities deferring to tradition, rather than rationally arguing the merits and demerits of having an underage child participate in a dangerous (potentially fatal) contest, portrays the inescapable power of magic. On the ideological level, this depiction of 'a mythical past beyond the reach of memory' whose parameters are 'limited and relatively changeless' (Stableford lii), thus accessible only through tradition rather than analysis, resonates with the neoliberal insistence on an unchanging status quo. Rowling uses this narrative strategy to depict responsible guide-figures as 'learned people, who have read many books' (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 16). The absolute power of tradition is evidenced when the authority figure of

¹⁹ Pratchett's books provide a sharp contrast to Rowling's series, because they use the strategies of immersive fantasy, 'set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world' (Mendlesohn, *Rhetoric* 59). While both Pratchett and Rowling depict magic and magical education as a central mode of life, Rowling consciously uses strategies of portal and quest fantasies to avoid the introspection into the laws of magic Pratchett allows his readers.

Mr. Crouch is asked to deliberate, because he has most knowledge of the book of rules:

“We must follow the rules, and the rules state clearly that those people whose names come out of the Goblet of Fire are bound to compete in the tournament.”

“Well, Barty knows the rule book back to front,” said Bagman, beaming and turning back to Karkaroff and Madame Maxime, as though the matter was now closed.

“...You can’t leave your champion now. He’s got to compete. They’ve all got to compete. Binding magical contract.” (Rowling, *Goblet* 243-244).

This fixed aspect of knowledge, governed by the authority of accepted tradition and binding contracts, structures magic in the books into a hegemony. The unquestionable authority of traditional history suggests that much of what the students learn is ‘inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed’ (Gramsci 333). The uncritical absorption of historical knowledge, without critical analysis of the political roots of history, comprises what Gramsci calls a hegemonic common sense. The term, in Gramsci’s original Italian usage, signifies ‘not just conventional wisdom but also all that is taken for granted in everyday life’ (Foley 79).²⁰ By transforming magical knowledge into a hegemony, Rowling fixes the principles of magic in the realm of the invisible.

Since these unknowable principles are at the roots of how magic functions, education at Hogwarts restricts critical thought. Existing scholarship

²⁰ In the Gramscian definition, *senso comune* is fundamentally concerned with the concealment of ideologically produced standards and principles as a body of impersonal, eternal truisms (Crehan 43-58). Rowling’s use of magic as a fixed, inexplicable force frames it as the common sense basis for life at Hogwarts.

has raised the question why, unlike in real life education, ‘neither students nor teachers appear to be curious about the source of their magical powers’ (Rosenberg 6). I argue that Rowling offers no narrative opportunity for this curiosity by hegemonically structuring the source as invisible. While Rosenberg comments that ‘the mechanisms that make our world work are knowable and that we should strive to discover them’ (6), this possibility of discovery itself is denied in the books through the image of the invisible hand of magic, which defies analytical understanding. Hegemonic knowledge denies the knowability of the mechanisms by which political truths are structured. Instead, it transforms ideologically fixed categories and social relations into given ‘truth.’

As demonstrated in the episode with the goblet of fire, Rowling confirms the hegemonic nature of magic in her frequent portrayals of the continued authority of history at Hogwarts.²¹ The metaphor of magic makes it possible to demonstrate history as literally intervening into everyday school life. Reading history itself is depicted in the school as ‘easily the most boring lesson,’ where the teacher ‘droned on and on while they scribbled down names and dates’ (Rowling, *Stone* 99). A more active presence of history, however, permeates Hogwarts- ‘ghostly or magical presences’ are depicted in the literal population of ghosts in the school, as physically manifest remnants of the past (Bradford 64). Rowling portrays Hogwarts as a literal embodiment of history, one which can come to life in times of need and protect the school. Thus, during the climactic battle for Hogwarts, magically invoked by Professor McGonagall, ‘all

²¹ This authority of history takes the form of the lingering influence of the Hogwarts founders in the magical school. Each founder is represented by a House (Rowling, *Stone* 85-86), and members of each House are expected to adhere to the attributes and qualities prioritised by their houses, which is incentivised by the reception of magical heirlooms of the founders themselves to worthy ideological descendants (*Chamber* 245).

along the corridor the statues and suits of armour jumped down from their plinths' to defend the school against the invading threat of Voldemort (Rowling, *Hallows* 484-485). Maria Sachiko Cecire reads this scene as a literalisation of the traditional values Hogwarts stands for, in the portrayal of the material suits of armour which decorate the school as 'relics of the past, emptied of specific historical meaning but evocative of a long moral and cultural tradition' (209). Rowling suggests in this episode that all of magical history is alive at Hogwarts, and can be resurrected at times of great need through the material loci of heirlooms and artefacts.

Hogwarts thus functions as a site where present action continues to be regulated and driven by the continued presence of a historical past, which is magically omnipresent. This omnipresence also affects how the school is run. While the incumbent Headmaster is the highest authority at Hogwarts, his office 'walls [are] covered with portraits of old headmasters and headmistresses' (Rowling, *Chamber* 154). These portraits are not decorative, however, but magically animated memories of all previous Heads. Their purpose is revealed in the fifth book, when one of them refuses to listen to Dumbledore:

"Insubordination, sir!" roared a corpulent, red-nosed wizard, brandishing his fists. "Dereliction of duty!"

"We are honour-bound to give service to the present Headmaster of Hogwarts!" cried a frail-looking old wizard whom Harry recognized as Dumbledore's predecessor, Armando Dippet (Rowling, *Phoenix* 418).

The continued voices of previous occupants of the castle thus permeate the present discourses at school. This presence of history as continually

affecting Hogwarts is not only made possible by magic, but is also honour-bound to a contract with the magical principle itself. Rowling draws on the importance of historical tradition in school stories to inspire ‘virtue and gentlemanly good form’ in young students (Puccio 58), and transforms the influence of history from an abstract to a literal form through the image of history magically coming to life.²² The study and analysis of history requires a retrospective perception; one needs to collect information from a fixed past in order to study it. Since magical history is depicted as a timeless, ever-flowing, living authority continuing to permeate the present, there is thus no way in the books to study it. ‘At times of relative stability,’ Foley argues, ‘... hegemony is largely limited by the horizons available to its proponents’ (83). Rowling limits these available horizons through the narrative denial of introspection into how magic itself works.

The narrative optimism of Harry’s curious discoveries of the secrets of magic is undercut by this fundamental unknowability of magic. Rowling employs the narrative strategy of offering increasing amounts of detail and new exotic secrets to uncover in Hogwarts every school year ‘in order to convince, to avoid too close analysis’ of how magic in Hogwarts itself functions (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 7). The ideological effect of this strategy is the depiction of Hogwarts as a hegemonic institution; magic is understood in the school in terms of common sense principles and practices to be adhered to, but not questioned. Within this hegemonic space, Rowling portrays a vision of

²² This untainted, unbroken presence of magic as a historical authority which perpetually regulates all action helps portray the conservatism of Rowling’s fantasy, where the invisible hand of magic comprises ‘myths of psychic order which help to contain critiques of disorder’ (Jackson, *Fantasy* 90). Since order is guaranteed by the omnipresent authority of magic itself, any disorder necessarily arises within its hierarchical structures, rather than from the hierarchy itself.

magical life regulated by traditional rituals and practices. The ideological roots of such rituals, authorised by the tradition of history, are rendered invisible. I argue in the next section that the continued historical influence of the four founders of Hogwarts, and their personal ideologies, is portrayed in terms of the house system. Governing social life at school, this system interpellates students into subjects. They are given group identities pre-fixed for them by hegemonic authority.

1.1.3 The Sorting Ceremony and Interpellation: Students as Competitive Subjects

The fundamental role of hegemonic institutions is the interpellation of individuals. This is a process through which individuals are invited to internalise and embrace identities which are actually fixed for them by ideological categories. It involves ‘hailing’ an individual, or recognising him/her in terms of a subjective identity, which is in reality a *meconnaissance* or misrecognition. This identity is not organic, but constructed according to pre-fixed, ideologically motivated categories. The success of interpellation lies in falsely convincing individuals that they have chosen this identity voluntarily, and it has not been imposed on them (Althusser 166-176). I argue in this section that the ritual of sorting students into houses at Hogwarts is a process of interpellation, which transforms them into fundamentally competitive subjects. The school story frequently employs the image of dividing students into groups or houses, to foster a sense of home-like loyalty.

This portrayal of houses in school stories, Paul M. Puccio argues, is inspired by the cultural insistence that ‘if boys ignored their home-lives upon entering public schools, they risked the integrity of their moral and spiritual

welfare' (62).²³ Rowling transforms this portrayal into an image of house systems which are not only concerned with promoting the 'home-lives' of students, but fundamentally redefine their house identities as essentially competitive. This structuring is motivated by the neoliberal ideology of the books, which perpetuates a 'theory of pure competition' (Shapiro 43). As I shall demonstrate, students in Hogwarts voluntarily compete in a system which judges, measures, and rewards them. The school judges the varying degrees of their 'worth' with regard to the houses they represent. I argue that Rowling uses this strategy to convincingly portray magical life as optimistic and free, while subtly imposing an external ideological rationale onto it. This strategy uses the optimistic narrative visions of fellowship, loyalty, and familial bonds within house identities to portray house life as fulfilling and beneficial. At a more subtle level, this structure suggests the idea of identity as pre-fixed and dependent upon already existing categories of division. Rowling's depiction of the house system reorganises magical life at Hogwarts in terms of group identities, which in turn structure social interaction among children primarily in competitive terms of reward and punishment.

The sorting ritual is the guarantor of entry into life at Hogwarts, and new students are reminded that 'before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses' (Rowling, *Stone* 85). To be recognised as students of magic, therefore, the child characters must first be recognised in

²³ The educationist Thomas Arnold, the headmaster of Rugby who features in Thomas Hughes' seminal school story, was a significant proponent of this vision of school life. He argues that it is crucial to nurture the moral compass which a healthy home-life fosters in young men. As Arnold posits, 'Boys, in their own families, as the members of the natural and wholesome society of their fathers' household, may receive its lessons and catch its spirit, and learn at a very early age to estimate right and wrong truly' (*Works* 365). It was imperative to his vision of education, one which inspired the theme in school stories, that schools replicate the natural and wholesome society for students through house/dormitory systems.

terms of their house identity. However, this is a process of subtly imposing an identity on characters, because the sorting simply ‘affirms an identity that is loaded in advance with all kinds of ideological assumptions’ (Foley 76). These ideological assumptions are concealed by the narrative insistence that the students’ sorting depends on their internal psychology; houses are depicted as representing different character traits, and students are selected into their houses based on their inherent capacity for the suitable trait. Investigating neoliberal hegemony’s efforts to legitimise itself, Frederic Gros argues that a legitimate ideological view of identity ‘is to be defined as the internal construction of the subject’ (25). The sorting ceremony is depicted as a confirmation of the potential qualities already inherent in the individual, while in actuality serving the identificatory function of the school as an ISA, in being able to look directly into the minds of the students, and judging to what fixed category they belong.

This function of identification and judgment in the books is served by the Sorting Hat, a unique magical artefact whose chief function is juridical, expressed in its proud claim that ‘there’s nothing hidden in your head the Sorting Hat can’t see’ (Rowling, *Stone* 88). In this sense, it exercises what Foucault calls pastoral power; the power an institution exercises over its subjects through the knowledge of ‘the inside of people’s minds...making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it’ (“Subject” 783). The Hat perceives the inner character of students, judges their inherent values and qualities, and puts them into one of the four houses which suit their moral character best.²⁴ This process of sorting is

²⁴ The texts evidence that the Hat is a self-aware, sentient artefact, which consciously prides itself on this power to judge the capacities of students, to the point of arrogance. When Rowling depicts Harry as

presented as optimistic by demonstrating that students do have a reasonable amount of control over which house they want to be in. In the final book, Harry assures his son, who is off to his first year at Hogwarts, that ‘you’ll be able to choose...the Sorting Hat takes your choice into account’ (Rowling, *Hallows* 607).

What this illusion of choice conceals, however, is the contingency of choice upon a pre-existing set of categories and values. The Hat’s judgment of moral character is carried out in essentialist terms, sorting ‘just and loyal’ characters into Hufflepuff, ‘cunning’ characters into Slytherin, and so forth. Harry can only choose which group he belongs to if he first accepts the validity of these different categories of qualities and character traits which have already been ‘chosen’ for him, in terms of the ‘daring, nerve and chivalry’ of Gryffindors vis-à-vis the ‘cunning folk’ who comprise the Slytherins (*Stone* 88). While his choice is celebrated as a moment of personal autonomy and freedom, it conceals that the identity he has just chosen is already ‘loaded in advance’ with the values his school associates with Gryffindor house (Foley 76). Harry’s personal autonomy in this episode is further complicated by the fact that his rejection of Slytherin membership is not governed by rational introspection, but by the guidance of other characters. This guidance is first offered to him by Hagrid, who insists that ‘there’s not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn’t in Slytherin’ (61-62), followed by an unpleasant encounter with Draco Malfoy, whose bullying of Ron inspires Harry to reject the former’s offer of friendship (81-82). His choice of Gryffindor is therefore not a normative or

challenging the Hat’s judgment by exclaiming, ‘you’re wrong,’ the Hat pointedly ends the conversation and refuses to grace him with a reply (*Chamber* 154-155).

positive identification with the group, as he indeed does not ‘feel brave or quick-witted’ (89) as he is being sorted. It is rather a learned renouncement of Slytherin, based on the opinions and behaviours of characters whose views of Hogwarts houses have already been configured by their familiarity with magical society.²⁵ Rowling thus depicts Harry’s decision as not based on a critical introspection of ‘right versus wrong,’ but the less matured factor of ‘who arouses his sympathy and who his antipathy’ (Bettelheim 14).

This strategy constructs Harry as a passive recipient of information rather than an active investigator; as Harry is a naive newcomer to the magical world, his only option is ‘making sense of it through the downloaded histories’ from guide-figures who explain to him social categories as they exist in the world (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 8). In portraying Harry’s choice of Gryffindor as dependent on knowledge he has received unquestioningly, Rowling successfully transforms the categorical divisions of the house system into the Gramscian common sense truth of social life at Hogwarts, as discussed earlier. That Harry actively chooses his identity is important to maintain the illusion of willingness. For interpellation to work efficiently in an ISA, it is imperative that the subjects voluntarily choose to identify with the categories laid out for them. Thus, Harry is offered the narrative choice in asking the Hat to put him in Gryffindor rather than Slytherin (90-91), an optimistic vision which has led scholar Chantel Lavoie to argue that the sorting of the houses is therefore ‘not deterministic but merely reflective’ (41). As demonstrated earlier, while the examination of

²⁵ Harry’s decision to choose Gryffindor over Slytherin is further inspired by the social incentive of forming a familial bond with Ron. In school stories, ‘family configurations and reconfigurations...appear consistently in the representations of these friendships’ (Puccio 67). As I shall further demonstrate in Chapter 3, Harry’s choice also rewards him with a social identity that comes with its benefits.

Harry's inner qualities may indeed be a reflective process, the prior fixing of ideological categories in terms of house values is very much deterministic in its essentialism. Further, the language depicting the moment of his inclusion into Gryffindor is saturated with optimism and relief, as well as the image of belonging, which insists that Harry's new identity as a Gryffindor will be beneficial for him:

Harry took off the hat and walked shakily towards the Gryffindor table. He was so relieved to have been chosen and not put in Slytherin, he hardly noticed that he was getting the loudest cheer yet. Percy the Prefect got up and shook his hand vigorously, while the Weasley twins yelled, "We got Potter! We got Potter!" (Rowling, *Stone* 91).

Finding 'something like [his] family within Hogwarts,' after years of growing up as an abused orphan, rationalises Harry's voluntary adoption of the ideals expected of him by his house. His magical life at school, therefore, begins with his adoption of a 'relatively firm personality [that] has been established on the basis of positive identifications' (Bettelheim 14). This adoption of Gryffindor as his new family is thus suggested to be a practical choice for the hitherto neglected Harry.²⁶ 'For Althusser,' argues Foley, 'ideology may derive from the socially necessary misunderstanding... but it is also consummately practical' (75). Individuals, in voluntarily responding to a categorical identity fixed for them, take 'the burden of social control off the coercive policies of the state' by consensually participating in the rituals and practices their group

²⁶ Puccio argues that 'inevitably, the public school system itself, while providing the means for boys to leave behind their homes and families, was often conceptualised as a kind of family' (68). In Harry's case, the contrast is far sharper. Not only is he initiated into a family at Hogwarts, but he had no wholesome or healthy home and family to leave behind in the first place, thus making this episode even more rewarding.

identity requires of them (76). The sorting thus transforms students into disciplined subjects; responding to and regulating themselves through an internalised, *voluntary* identification to certain pre-fixed categories. Even conflicts between the child characters in the books are crystallised around their enthusiastic and willing competition for house points, as evidenced in Malfoy's abuse of power in *Order of the Phoenix* to dock points from his rivals:

Harry, Ron, and Hermione had turned automatically toward the giant hourglasses set in niches along the wall behind them, which recorded the House points. Gryffindor and Ravenclaw had been neck and neck in the lead that morning. Even as they watched, stones flew upward, reducing the amounts in the lower bulbs. In fact, the only glass that seemed unchanged was the emerald-filled one of Slytherin (Rowling, *Phoenix* 552).

The house point system is structured as a reward and punishment mechanic to ensure the adherence of students to the moral codes of conduct expected of them at school. As I discuss in Chapter 3, point collection is structured in the form of a tournament of values at Hogwarts²⁷. This is a crucial function of Hogwarts as an ISA, in producing students as 'subjected and practised bodies,' where they are constantly and comparatively judged on the basis of their adherence to the principles which define their house identities (Foucault, *Discipline* 138). School stories portray a reasonable level of inter-student competition as a means of showcasing one's industrious identity. As Bristow comments, since the 19th century, texts have been informed by the

²⁷ In cultural criticism, a tournament of values represents a regulated event where subjects compete for a specialised mode of currency or status, which is pointedly differentiated from overt economic value. In Rowling's case, the house points function as this specialised currency, whose value derives from the disciplinary regime at Hogwarts. See Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3.

‘public school ideology that produced more and more of this new breed of competitive gentlemen’ (68). However, while such an ideology was largely informed by the classical liberal governmentality, Rowling’s house system functions in accordance with the neoliberal discourse, which reconfigures individuals as structurally competitive commodities-unto-themselves (Littler 3-12; Sugarman 104). This is evidenced in the centrality of the inter-house tournaments, both on the sports field and on the basis of a monitoring of their academic prowess and behaviour in school, where the children are told ‘your triumphs will earn you house points, while any rule-breaking will lose house points’ (Rowling, *Stone* 85). Competition at Hogwarts is no longer restricted to regulated tournaments like older school stories, where although there was ‘an environment that staked an increasingly high value on competition,’ such competition was subject to episodic events ‘on the sports field or in Latin recitation’ (Bristow 59). Instead, Hogwarts supplements episodic tournaments like Quidditch matches with a constant, omnipresent supervision of social behaviour among students, according to which they are judged and awarded/deducted points. This competitive tournament of accumulating house points runs without any break throughout the year, and is upheld as a matter of great prestige for students.²⁸

This constant surveillance and judgment of students’ activity in terms of house competition performs the function of ‘the examination’ which Foucault argues is an integral practice in governing subjects within an institution. In the development of the modern technology of power, he posits, the school as an

²⁸ See Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3, for an analysis of how social prestige is framed by Rowling within the obsessive accumulation of points for one’s house.

institution has become less concerned with ‘jousts in which pupils pitched their forces against one another,’ and more with ‘a perpetual comparison of each and all that made it possible both to measure and to judge’ (*Discipline* 186).

Students are judged according to their performance on behalf of their houses, and rewarded or punished accordingly. In depicting the house system as the primary identity of child characters as Hogwarts students, Rowling effectively frames the child characters’ academic, athletic, as well as behavioural activity within their voluntary adoption and exercise of house identity. This centrality of house identity, and its ideological construction as categories of fixed values which members are expected to adhere to, derives its authority from the traditional figures of the Hogwarts founders. As discussed in section 1.1.2, Hogwarts’ hegemonic control over actions which occur within its boundaries is often authorised by the living presence of history in the school. With the interpellated house identities, too, the living history of Hogwarts’ founders affects events and quests. In addition to house points, as Harry discovers in *Chamber of Secrets*, exemplary adherence to the principles of Gryffindor results in the magical inheritance of the Sword of Gryffindor, a weapon once wielded by the founding member Godric Gryffindor himself. Through the medium of the Sorting Hat, the sword is gifted to those who are judged to be ‘true Gryffindors’ in its assessment (245). The narrative frames this acquisition in triumphant, affectively charged visions of good overthrowing evil, such as Neville’s slaying of the serpent Nagini in a ‘slash of the silver blade’ (Rowling, *Hallows* 587). This Sword is not simply a reward for courage, but an heirloom that was once owned by Gryffindor himself. Thus the magical sword, imbued with the

presence of the founding member, continues to authorise the characters' membership in the house which represents his ideology.²⁹

Conflicts between the houses, particularly Gryffindor and Slytherin, are depicted as motivated not so much by present causes, but authorised by past rivalries. When Harry uses the weapon of Gryffindor to slay the serpent loyal to Slytherin (Rowling, *Chamber* 236), it is symbolic of the conflict between two opposing ideologies. Gryffindor's and Slytherin's ideologies, disseminated through the Hogwarts house system and their corresponding moral categories of value, are repeated here through the actions of different subjects who have nevertheless been similarly interpellated into internalising those values. This ideological conflict is reinforced in Harry's rivalry against Voldemort by direct, ancestral notions of bloodline; Voldemort is a descendant of Slytherin through the Gaunt family, while Gryffindor is an ancestor to Harry through the Peverells (Rowling, *Chamber* 229; *Hallows* 352). Their conflict, therefore, has the implications of a blood-feud, re-enacting a historical clash between their biological as well as ideological ancestors. This constructs Harry as a somewhat passive hero, *through* whom a historical conflict repeats itself. John Rowe Townsend identifies the theme of how historical legend continues to manifest itself in present action, arguing that narratives which employ this strategy are dominated in terms of 'absorbing old tales and retransmitting them with increased power' (Townsend 234). This assessment holds true for Rowling's

²⁹ The metaphor of magic, and the acquisition of magical heirlooms from ancestral figures, help Rowling literalise the fruits of one's committed loyalty to traditional authority. In both Harry's and Neville's cases, their 'morally responsible and physically strong manliness' is no longer rewarded with merely abstract, traditional praise (Bristow 54). Instead, the importance of loyalty is visibly highlighted by their reception of heirlooms from the immortal presence of Godric Gryffindor himself, a thousand years after his death.

depiction of the conflict between Harry and Voldemort as a reenactment of the old ideological Gryffindor-Slytherin rivalry. Their opposing moral ideologies provide as equally important a *casus belli* for their conflict as the personal history of violence between the characters.³⁰

This atmosphere of competition as an ever-present mode of interaction is not accidental, but a result of how the house system is consciously designed to actively ‘maximise intergroup conflict’ in the books (Beers and Apple 37). This construction perpetuates in Hogwarts the rationale of neoliberal political economy, which thrives on competition and ‘often seeks the creation of disparity in order to spur innovation’ (Shapiro 44). Hogwarts school culture creates such disparity, openly encouraging the stereotyping of students from other houses according to their group identities. Thus, Gryffindors in *Goblet of Fire* are quick to criticise school champion Cedric as ‘Pretty-Boy Diggory’ based on the assumption of Hufflepuff house members being soft and ill-suited to athletic and academic prowess. This happens despite the obvious reality of Cedric’s accomplishments both as a good student and a Quidditch captain (Rowling, *Goblet* 230). The competitive structure of the house tournaments is further exacerbated through unchecked favouritism of teachers for their houses.³¹ Rather than resolving tensions, maintaining the conflict and the stereotypes seems to be the aim of the faculty. The final book strongly evidences

³⁰ The centrality of history, rather than the actors themselves, is a strategy also used in Alan Garner’s *The Owl Service* to show the central characters slowly losing control over themselves and becoming pawns in the hands of history. This text provides a productive counterpoint due to its similar show of passivity in the journey of the central figures. Throughout the book, the characters Alison, Roger, and Gwyn become increasingly affected by an ancient Welsh legendary conflict, which seeks to magically re-enact itself through their actions.

³¹ The most frequently and overtly depicted character who indulges in this behaviour is Snape, the Potions Master. Rowling depicts him deliberately stopping other houses from practising Quidditch by booking the pitch for his team, so that they can practise more often or have a better chance at winning matches (*Chamber* 85), and pointedly overlooking the misdemeanours of his own students (*Goblet* 263).

this, as the attempted betrayal of Harry to Voldemort by a single member of the Slytherin house gets her entire house punished for her personal crime:

Before Harry could speak, there was a massive movement. The Gryffindors in front of him had risen and stood facing, not Harry, but the Slytherins. Then the Hufflepuffs stood, and almost at the same moment, the Ravenclaws, all of them, with their backs to Harry, all of them looking toward Pansy instead, and Harry, awe-struck and overwhelmed, saw wands emerging everywhere, pulled from beneath cloaks and under sleeves.

“Thank you, Miss Parkinson,” said Professor McGonagall in a clipped voice. “You will leave the Hall first with Mr. Filch. If the rest of your House could follow...” (Rowling, *Hallows* 490-491).

This episode confirms the stereotypical view of Slytherins as loyal to Voldemort’s (and Salazar Slytherin’s) ideology *en masse*, the central aspect of their subjective identities on which judgment is passed on the entire group.³²

Identity is thus interpellated around ‘two types of loyalties- that which the individual owes to the school, and that which is owing [sic] to one’s house’ (Lavoie 35), and the dependence of the latter upon a sense of competitive rivalry with other groups has led scholars to contend that ‘the founders may have literally pitted the students against each other to help motivate all of them to maximise their potential’ (Beers and Apple 40). This deliberate construction of the house system to maximise conflict is informed by the neoliberal view of the world as categorised into groups with different levels of ability and merit who

³² Notably, the film adaptation of this event takes the stereotyping of Slytherins even further; while in the books McGonagall simply banishes the Slytherins from the hall, in the film she insists that they are confined in the dungeons underneath the school (Yates, *Hallows* 2 39:21- 40:05).

are perpetually competing amongst themselves. While competition, as discussed, is a feature of traditional school stories, the magical setting of Rowling's school, and the neoliberal organisation of Hogwarts school life, transform competition from a periodic test of students' abilities to a constant surveillance and judgment of their behaviour. Mullen identifies that the function of Hogwarts is very much 'to train its students... to understand, appreciate, and practise the virtues that make a place like Hogwarts possible' (133). The virtues of competitive social life are portrayed through the house identity, and this portrayal is deeply influenced by a neoliberal conception of the self as competitive. The metaphor of magic, both in terms of the omniscient sentience of the castle and the living presence of its founders, makes the panoptical regulation of these virtues practiced by students possible.³³

Hogwarts succeeds in fulfilling the roles of both the perpetuation of a hegemonic understanding of magical power as 'common sense,' and the interpellation of students into competitive subjects whose identities are ideologically fixed. The efficiency of hegemonic control lies in its ability to keep the source of its authority impersonal and invisible. In the following section, I argue that the moral superiority of this hegemonic mode of education is insisted through the depiction of corrupt, coercive models as foils, thus presenting as morally superior the act of preserving the existing, hegemonic status quo, and owing allegiance to it.

³³ Rowling is thus able to literalise, despite her fantasy being an ostensibly secular one, the never-ending magical regulation of what in earlier school stories was portrayed in terms of 'a muscular Christianity calling for *mens sana in corpore sano*' (Winn 72). Physical prowess is judged and examined on the Quidditch field, frequently characterised by painful injuries which characters learn to endure (Rowling, *Chamber* 130-131; *Goblet* 312-313). Behavioural and social prowess, on the other hand, is constantly regulated and judged by teachers, prefects, and authority figures who award/deduct house points (*Stone* 131-132; *Phoenix* 751).

1.1.4 Hogwarts as Site of Ideological Conflict: Coercion versus Hegemony

I have discussed how Hogwarts functions as an ISA to construct a hegemonic model of magical knowledge, which derives its authority from an impersonal invisible hand of magic and historical tradition. I argue in this section that coercive state control, which derives its authority from a *visible* political sovereign, is depicted as a foil to hold up the hegemonic model as a morally superior mode of governance. The narrative strategy employed in *Order of the Phoenix*, as I shall argue, makes Dolores Umbridge the central antagonist and portrays the Ministry's interference at Hogwarts as an undesirable aggression (550-551). Harry and his friends ultimately triumph over this regime, in restoring the depersonalised mode of administration represented by Dumbledore, who has no visible political allegiance. In doing so, Rowling portrays the preservation of the status quo as the only mode of moral action. This moral perspective is informed by the neoliberal imperative to 'create and preserve an institutional framework,' where the intervention of visible political authority 'must be kept to a bare minimum' (Harvey, *Neoliberalism* 2). In contrast to the hegemonic functioning of Hogwarts which is presented as politically unmotivated, Umbridge represents a mode of administration which is visibly controlled by a political authority, one 'fundamentally grounded on issues of repressive juridicality, especially with regards to the relationship between sovereign and a subject of rights' (Shapiro 45). This undermines the efficient hegemonic mode of control through voluntary interpellation, in opting to make her political motivation *visible* for her subjects. Overriding and subverting the efficient house system discussed in the last section, she enforces her authority through a secret police-like inquisitorial squad, 'a select group of

students who are supportive of the Ministry of Magic, hand-picked by Professor Umbridge' (Rowling, *Phoenix* 551).³⁴

This move effectively transforms the administration of Hogwarts from an ISA to a Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). RSAs govern by repression and policing, and make the source of authority visible for subjects. Rowling uses this visibility of Umbridge's politics to mark her as an undesirable administrator. Astute characters like Hermione spot this visible authority at the very beginning, commenting that her presence in the school indicates that 'the Ministry's interfering at Hogwarts' (193). The blatant visibility of the Ministry's repression of what it will or will not allow students to do at school attacks their hegemonic understanding of school life as voluntary. Kathryn N. McDaniel argues that Umbridge's interference is confirmed by having Hermione, the most discerning of the three central characters, identify the teacher's political motive. Unlike Harry and Ron, 'she knows how to listen, how to sort through what people say to hear what they mean' ("Lecturing" 294). By portraying a discerning child character discovering the unpleasant motives of a deceitful adult intruder in the school space, Rowling marks Umbridge as a morally undesirable figure whose ultimate downfall helps cement the children's moral superiority.

This undesirability of Umbridge as administrator of Hogwarts pedagogy is reinforced through her repulsive depiction. She is first introduced in a pointedly hostile situation, as one of the jurors who seem too eager to expel

³⁴ This Squad is inferior to the house system as a mode of regulation and surveillance. As discussed in the previous section, while the house point system creates an efficient, constant panoptical control of the behaviours of students, Umbridge's regime is restricted by her dependence on individual, human regulators (Rowling, *Hallows* 536-537). While the impersonal magical surveillance avoids the visibility of coercive power, the unpleasant figures of Malfoy and his peers immediately marks them as an undesirable form of authority.

Harry from school on a false charge. She is described as resembling ‘a large, pale toad...even the little black velvet bow perched on top of her short curly hair put [Harry] in mind of a large fly she was about to catch on a long sticky tongue’ (134). This use of an animal metaphor depicts her appearance as hideous and grotesque, and her behaviour as revealed during her tenure as teacher soon confirms her inner undesirability as well. She is depicted as enjoying inflicting physical pain on students (240-241) and also has an unrepentantly racist outlook, exemplified by her cruel treatment of Hagrid (395-397). It is overtly suggested that her infantilising vision about young students leads the young witches/wizards to be ‘rather taken-aback at being addressed as though they were five years old’ (191), and this resentment and hostility portray her as somebody who is bound to be rejected by the student community at Hogwarts. This narrative unpleasantness frames her as a figure who intends to deny the students the right of choice. Umbridge thus features as the inept school master, whose failure to command the respect of her students is predicated upon the moral undesirability of her stance. Bristow identifies figures like her in school stories, where ‘wrongly assuming they can do as they wish in their pursuit of boys who have strayed out of bounds, the masters fail to live up to their own standards’ (78). Umbridge’s own standards are further complicated by Rowling through her connection to overt political ambition. Frequent references to her loyalty to the Ministry construct her quest for power in terms of an external, political interference into the existing administration of Hogwarts. She thus provides a foil who transforms, by comparison, Hogwarts into an apparently radical establishment resisting her tyranny, concealing the culture of conformity subtly operating at the magical school.

The conflict between the students and the repressive authority of Umbridge is narrated in terms of a resistance against tyranny, an optimistic construction which ultimately frames the restoration of the hegemonic administration as the triumph of good over evil. This narrative of resistance crystallises around Harry and his friends' foundation of Dumbledore's Army, a group of children who decide to train themselves in magic, and are defiant in their political resistance against Umbridge (Rowling, *Phoenix* 303-311). Harry features as the rallying point for this resistance, and the narrative portrays a liberating vision of young children who take 'matters into [their] own hands' and rebel against 'the rubbish that Umbridge is doing with [them]' (303). David Rosen and Sarah Maya Rosen note the 'resurgence of the heroic child warrior' in the depiction of Dumbledore's Army as fighting out of nothing but personal will (122).³⁵ Harry's resistance is portrayed as moral, because it offers to return the element of personal choice denied by Umbridge to the characters' actions. The protagonist Harry and his allies decide to go into conflict out of choice; they answer the call of their own volition and an internalised notion of duty. This is evident in the collective decision taken by the children to travel to London and rescue Sirius from Voldemort, where the language suggests the willingness of the actors to exercise their magical autonomy.

³⁵ This narrative depiction of Harry voluntarily taking up the good cause is important in depicting his actions as motivated by no discernible external source. The moral desirability of his action depends on this overt claim for his 'independent initiative and judgment,' instilled in him by the traditional themes of liberal school education (Dingley 6). The hegemonically interpellated set of values which he has internalised through the house system, and which motivate this loyalty towards Hogwarts and the need to reject Umbridge, must remain invisible to avoid Hogwarts from exposing its coercive ideological role.

“We were all in the D.A. together,” said Neville quietly. “It was all supposed to be about fighting You-Know-Who, wasn’t it? And this is the first chance we’ve had to do something real — or was that all just a game or something?”

“No — of course it wasn’t —” said Harry impatiently.

“Then we should come too,” said Neville simply. “We want to help.”

“That’s right,” said Luna, smiling happily (Rowling, *Phoenix* 671).

This narrative portrayal of children voluntarily going into war is framed within the Rousseauian notion that it is ‘the rights and duties of all citizens, men, women and children, to resist oppression’ (Rosen and Rosen 117). As with the sorting ceremony, it is crucial for this choice to be depicted as voluntary and originating from the characters themselves, rather than an external, visible voice of authority. While Umbridge names the Inquisitorial squad after her official position of authority as High Inquisitor (Rowling, *Hallows* 551), Harry and his friends name themselves Dumbledore’s Army, as a joke at the expense of the Ministry (347). Like the clash between hegemonic and repressive control, the contrast between these two opposing groups of child warriors also lies in the visibility of the source or authority of ideology that motivates them.

Malfoy, a moral foil to Harry in this regard, fights for an ideology rooted in sovereignty, or the authority of an individual. Hence, throughout the text, his compromised moral stance is framed within his allegiance to the coercive figure of the Ministry. Rowling represents him as fighting for the morally evil side in terms of the visibility of his motivations in attempting to impress Umbridge, rather than responding to an internalised moral code. Rowling further establishes the dangers of submitting one’s choices to a visible sovereign in the

last two books, where Malfoy's eagerness to fight for the authority of a sovereign ruler brings him to the brink of moral and psychological destruction. Rowling documents Malfoy's failing mental state and deteriorating strength of personal will upon being forced to perform evil acts by Voldemort (*Prince* 488). As a disciplined subject, he loses his voluntary individual choice and freedom, as 'Voldemort feels no moral duty toward children, nor does he consider children to be capable assets or persons of any discernible use' (Rosen and Rosen 128). Malfoy is thus presented as the moral opposite to Harry, highlighting the dangers to individual freedom and choice posed by submission to a visible sovereign authority, rather than an internalised code of morals.

Harry and his comrades do not follow this coercive model of action, and act out of an allegiance to an ideology that they have internalised in terms of moral duty. Much of this internalisation, as demonstrated in section 1.1.3, is framed by their interpellated house identities, and thus a loyalty to the institution of Hogwarts. The triumphant end to *Order of the Phoenix* sees the return of Dumbledore, the expulsion of Umbridge, and the restoration of the status quo which presents itself as insulated from any visible political control (745-748). The preservation of Hogwarts, and all that is good within it, thus communicates a moral preference for hegemonic institutions governing through invisible ideologies, over coercive ones which make authority-figures visible.³⁶

³⁶ The superiority of Dumbledore's position as an authority figure to follow is portrayed through his reluctance to command his students, and his passive communication of the values he personally holds precious. While Umbridge expects the subjects to her regime to obey her 'sermon word-for-word,' Dumbledore represents the figure of the upright headmaster of the school story, and 'the boy must comprehend what drives a man...to stand so nobly by his convictions' (Bristow 61). By leading by example, rather than coercion, Dumbledore claims his position as an equal subject of Hogwarts hegemony, rather than its visible administrator, thus portraying himself as more deserving of loyalty.

Rowling depicts the students' willingness to preserve the hegemony of Hogwarts through the image of loyalty to Dumbledore. While loyalty to Umbridge is portrayed as moral failure due to the visibility of her authority, Harry's loyalty to Dumbledore is held up as a marker of his moral superiority. Rowling presents Dumbledore as more deserving of loyalty through his characterisation as someone who does not claim to be the source of authority, but is a custodian or preserver of the impersonal authority represented by magic itself. Thus, while Umbridge's authority is marked visibly 'by order of the Ministry of Magic' (Rowling, *Hallows* 550), Dumbledore allows the invisible hand of magic to guide his students without asserting personal authority (Stone 219). McDaniel identifies that Rowling portrays the moral superiority of a model of pedagogy which 'is not boring, does not alienate students or deny them their voice, and does not turn them into passive automatons' ("Lecturing" 294). Umbridge's moral authority is undermined by her complicity in each of these unpleasant tactics in the classroom, refusing any engagement and asserting to her students, 'you are not qualified to decide what the "whole point" of any class is' (Rowling, *Phoenix* 218).

As the moral opposite to Umbridge, Rowling defines Dumbledore in overtly positive terms, as an old man with a flowing white beard, who jokes with his students and is affectionate towards them (Stone 91-92). His description mirrors wizard-teachers of earlier fantasy, from the sage Nemmerle in *A Wizard of Earthsea* whose 'hair and beard and robe were white' (Le Guin 45) like Dumbledore's, to Alan Garner's kind Cadellin (38-39).³⁷ All three are similar in

³⁷ The archetypal folk figure that these examples are drawn from is, of course, Merlin (Green, *Arthur* 16-17). As with Dumbledore, he is a magical mentor who dedicates his life guiding a 'chosen' prince to reclaim his inheritance.

their primary role as mentor, as ‘careers for major wizards, besides instructing new recruits, are not numerous’ (Clute and Grant 1027). Allegiance to Dumbledore is thus constructed as allegiance to the mentor who instructs, rather than commands, in the ways of magic. Rowling uses the Ministry as an unpleasant, power-hungry foil to portray Dumbledore, and the hegemonic institution he represents, as more deserving of loyalty, as evidenced in the following conversation between the headmaster and Harry:

“[The Minister] accused me of being ‘Dumbledore’s man through and through.’”

“How very rude of him.”

“I told him I was.”

Dumbledore opened his mouth to speak and then closed it again. Behind Harry, Fawkes the phoenix let out a low, soft, musical cry. To Harry’s intense embarrassment, he suddenly realized that Dumbledore’s bright blue eyes looked rather watery, and stared hastily at his own knees. When Dumbledore spoke, however, his voice was quite steady.

“I am very touched, Harry” (Rowling, *Prince* 334-335).

The contrast between the unscrupulous Minister’s direct request for Harry’s loyalty for his own political gains (323-326) and Dumbledore’s emotional, personal response to Harry’s allegiance to him, allows Rowling to firmly depict the headmaster as the symbolic representative of the ‘good’ side. In *Chamber of Secrets* as well, the narrative *deus ex machina* which intervenes in the climactic battle to both save Harry’s life and rescue him from evil, is depicted as contingent upon his act of loyalty to the headmaster of Hogwarts.

The sword he uses to kill the Basilisk is brought to him by Fawkes the phoenix, who arrives in the Chamber of Secrets (Rowling, *Chamber* 232). It is revealed to him that he ‘must have shown [Dumbledore] real loyalty,’ as nothing else could have summoned the bird (244). Allegiance to Dumbledore, and thus the ‘good’ side, also absolves characters of past allegiances to evil. The redemption arc of Severus Snape evidences this. Throughout the books, he is depicted as a bitter, cruel man, who used to support Voldemort, and bullies and unfairly causes great pain to Harry out of a childhood hatred for Harry’s father James. However, in the final book, after he sacrifices himself to Voldemort (*Hallows* 529-553), it is revealed that he had been in Dumbledore’s service all along, and had been trusted by the headmaster in the plan to defeat Voldemort once and for all. This loyalty absolves him of his unfair and deeply abusive behaviour in an emotionally charged episode:

After a moment or two, Snape raised his face, and he looked like a man who had lived a hundred years of misery...Snape seemed to peer through a haze of pain, and Dumbledore’s words appeared to take a long time to reach him...

At last he said, ‘Very well. Very well. But never—never tell, Dumbledore! This must be between us! Swear it! I cannot bear ... especially Potter’s son ... I want your word!’

“My word, Severus, that I shall never reveal the best of you?” Dumbledore sighed, looking down into Snape’s ferocious, anguished face. ‘If you insist ...’ (544-545).

All of Snape's past transgressions, from his role in the murder of Harry's parents to his constant mistreatment of Harry,³⁸ are forgiven in this episode through the portrayal of his allegiance to Dumbledore and the 'good' side he represents, confirmed in Harry's naming his son after Snape, 'the bravest man [he] ever knew' (607). This absolution is framed in optimistic, emotionally charged language, and suggests the importance of allegiance to Dumbledore, and his hegemonic model of conducting magic at Hogwarts. Stephen Deets argues that 'Rowling does not take a clear stand' on whether school administration or the media system in the books 'has some higher public purpose or whether it is just an object over which various political and economic interests compete' ("Classroom" 743). This reading is explained by the understanding of the deeply neoliberal vision of social life in the texts: moral authority is attributed not to those without political and economic interests, but those who succeed in keeping such interests invisible hegemonically. Umbridge's visibility of ambition, as opposed to Dumbledore's championing of the hegemonic, impersonal magical control at Hogwarts, marks her as undesirable.

Moral governance at Hogwarts, therefore, is depicted as a mode of administration which separates the source of authority from any visible, individual sovereign. In an ISA, the 'process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates that power' is of central importance to the functioning of the institution (Foucault, "Geography" 69). Having demonstrated

³⁸ This mistreatment consistently characterises the relationship between the two characters, beginning with Snape's unnecessary bullying of a clearly ignorant Harry by asking him difficult questions to humiliate him in class (Rowling, *Stone* 102-104), to his deliberate punishment to ensure Harry cannot participate in what would be the last Quidditch match of his school life (*Prince* 494).

the hegemonic functioning of administration at Hogwarts, I analyse how knowledge functions as a form of power at Hogwarts in the next section. I argue that magical knowledge functions as a form of power by offering its users greater access (and thus control) to the ontological truths of the world, which are hidden to muggles and are therefore beyond non-magical power. Such knowledge is passed on to child characters as downloaded information, rather than fostering any sense of scientific inquiry into the underlying laws of magic.

1.2. Magic as an Elite Knowledge-System: The Hogwarts Classroom

1.2.1 ‘Natural Magic’ at Hogwarts

Hegemonic institutions are integrally involved in regulating and disseminating ideologically structured disciplines of knowledge. Foucault observes in post-1970s neoliberal disciplinary institutions, including the school, ‘an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge’ (69). Magic in *Harry Potter* is portrayed as a privileged system of knowledge, where ‘relations of power’ between the elite wizards and the non-magical underclass is structured in terms of who has greater access to the knowledge or ‘truths’ of the world they inhabit. Richard Kieckheffer defines this understanding of magic as an elite body of information in terms of natural magic, ‘not distinct from science, but a branch of science...that dealt with “occult virtues”’ (or hidden powers) within nature (9).³⁹ Thus, practitioners of natural magic were believed to owe their magical ability to an accumulated, systematic knowledge of certain hidden, occult powers of everyday natural

³⁹ This definition of magic is closely related to alchemy, which can be described as a form of science akin to chemistry, but with a larger epistemological scale due to its knowledge not only of scientific, but hidden/arcane properties of substances (van der Lugt 229-277).

objects around them (11-18). Hogwarts School functions in terms of training its students in this systematic knowledge of the world, so that they are able to have greater and more sophisticated effects on the natural world than muggles could ever have.⁴⁰

At the same time, this knowledge is harnessed only by those who are born with an innate magical ability and are thus admitted into the institution. In this section, I argue that magic is constructed in the books as a discipline which offers greater knowledge of and control over the natural world. Such knowledge is downloaded for the protagonist in terms of a secret body of magical information. Hogwarts functions not only as the site where characters are offered access to magical information, but is actively regulatory of denying that access to the non-magical society and maintaining its elite status. I shall argue that this dual function of Hogwarts structures magic as a knowledge-system which maintains its superior status through a mode of exclusion for the non-elite, while simultaneously reinforcing the image of an invisible hand which governs magical activity through its own, unknowable principles. This invisibility, as the final section of this chapter shall discuss, is the metaphor employed by Rowling to avoid any introspection into how this hierarchical system of exclusion comes to exist in the first place.

1.2.2 Magical Education: Knowledge as Revelation of Secret, Elite Information

The accumulation of knowledge and increasingly detailed revelations about the world, as discussed in the context of Hogwarts, is an important strategy

⁴⁰ These abilities are described in terms of access to alchemical ingredients to brew potions with great power (Rowling, *Stone* 102), magical incantations which can open locked doors (119), and the occasional ability to predict the future correctly (*Azkaban* 238).

employed in portal and quest fantasies to ensure the continued, passive downloading of information for the protagonist(s), as opposed to real introspection into the mechanisms of the fantasy world. As the *Harry Potter* series progresses, more is revealed about the magical world, and it is consistently suggested that greater knowledge offers greater autonomy and empowerment in the long run. Harry's climactic battle against his nemesis is thus preceded by the suggestion made to him in the sixth book that to truly defeat Voldemort, it 'makes absolute sense to know as much about Voldemort as possible' to 'help [Harry] survive' (Rowling, *Prince* 261). Knowledge about the characters is slowly uncovered for Harry to piece together a narrative of history. The Pensieve is a material metaphor for the recovery of memory in the books; it is introduced as a magical reservoir for old memories, through which one can directly experience history, and can 'spot patterns and links' about the past. As Roni Natov posits, it is an artefact through which 'sharing thoughts and passing on experience is brilliantly depicted' in the narrative (138). Much of the narrative of the two final books in the series is governed by a slow, accumulative collection of knowledge which ultimately reveals to the hero the full extent of the story he must learn to defeat his nemesis. This strategy thus makes the reception of knowledge of central narrative importance to the success of Harry's quest.

The literalisation through the magical Pensieve of knowledge in terms of snippets of memory depicts the notion of knowledge not as an introspective analysis of the past, but as an episodic revelation of sequential events. Mendlesohn comments on 'reverie' as a strategy used in portal and quest fantasies, which is involved in a 'ritualisation of memory' which 'reduces

characters to that which can be described in terms essentially photographic’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 11). Throughout the *Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore’s private lessons to Harry are revealed to be not training in advanced magic, as the children expect, but a recurrent use of the Pensieve to provide Harry ‘photographic’ sequences of Voldemort’s activities since childhood, with an aim to uncover his ultimate motive (244-260).⁴¹ The narrative episodes where memory is uncovered, especially in Harry’s attempts to coax Horace Slughorn into giving up an incriminating yet crucial bit of knowledge about Voldemort’s quest for immortality, are structured in terms of a mystery narrative; Harry’s detective-like inquiry and gradual accumulation of knowledge is depicted as paramount to his chances of defeating Voldemort (449-466). Knowledge that is gradually downloaded and used to reconstruct history, therefore, is crucial if Harry is to triumph in his quest.

This constant downloading of knowledge for the child characters through more learned teacher-figures governs the pedagogy at Hogwarts. Such a narrative strategy constructs magical education as an ever-proliferating network of information about the fantasy world, and acts to ‘shut the protagonist out of real engagement with the world’ and seal ‘the protagonist into the club story with the superficial factoids of tourism and a sense of wonder’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 136). At the narrative level, Rowling avoids portraying the constant

⁴¹ The metaphor of the pensieve helps represent the connection between memories and piecing together a coherent sense of community in literal terms. As Veysel Apaydin argues, ‘the meanings and values embodied in heritage and material culture store memories for various groups, and have varied meanings and values’ (17). It is only through the magical downloading of information in the form of Voldemort’s memories, that Harry can fully comprehend the importance of his heritage and his plans, without which he can never triumph over his nemesis. Memories are the structural units which give meaning to the causality of past events (Robins, “Memory” 2993-3013; Burnham 473-489). The image of magic helps depict Harry’s putting together of these units to complete the coherent block of information in literal terms.

downloading of information as dull by building this sense of wonder through the exotic nature of information being offered in the school of magic. Every school year promises child characters the access to more advanced magic spells, more exotic magical creatures and plants, and more strange and bizarre potions, the prospect of which appeals to the child characters.

“Greenhouse three today, chaps!” said Professor Sprout, who was looking distinctly disgruntled, not at all her usual cheerful self.

There was a murmur of interest. They had only ever worked in greenhouse one before — greenhouse three housed far more interesting and dangerous plants (Rowling, *Chamber* 70-71).

The children’s curiosity in this episode is soon satisfied, as they are introduced to the Mandrake, a bizarre plant whose roots resemble an animated infant, whose cry is fatal to those who hear it. Moreover, this sense of wonder is supplemented by the information, provided through a classroom question-and-answer exchange, that the plant is a ‘powerful restorative’ and is ‘used to return people who have been transfigured or cursed to their original state’ (72).

Magical information is thus portrayed as both appealing in its novelty and wonder, and empowering in its revelation of hidden properties of things which can be acted upon to create powerful magical effects.⁴² This construction helps Rowling avoid the dull, didactic aspect of a passive downloading of information, by framing such information as both useful and exotic. Torbjorn L. Knutsen suggests that the books ‘put more emphasis on going to school and

⁴² Rowling’s portrayal of magical education therefore represents the possibility of expanding the limits of what non-magical knowledge can possibly know. The desirability of magical education is represented in its extension of the epistemological field of possible knowledge. As Jackson argues, ‘fantasy exposes a culture’s definitions of that which can be; it traces the limits of its epistemological and ontological frame’ (*Fantasy* 14).

taking classes because Hogwarts is not just any run-of-the mill school; it is a school of wizardry and witchcraft' (197). David K. Steege's argument closely parallels this, when he argues that the metaphor of magical education offers 'elements that are new and delightful for all' (154). This narrative proliferation of cumulatively more new and delightful images serves to prevent the reading experience from stagnating in the passive downloading of information. Particularly among adolescent readers, 'independent curiosity' is a primary motivator of interest in narratives (Sullivan, "Reader Response" 88). Because Rowling's vision of magical education offers no insight into the inner, invisible principles of magic, she employs this strategy of constantly embroidering new, exciting information to preserve the readers' 'enthusiastic immersion in the content of the exchanges' of information offered (87).

That 'Harry's first encounters with the magic world are full of reminders of his ignorance' is an important narrative strategy in portraying the young magical initiate as a *tabula rasa*, for whom new information is to be downloaded (Hopkins 25). This model of education also serves the disciplinary purpose of constructing the child subject's identity as a wizard. Drawing upon the works of Foucault, James D. Marshall identifies the school as an institution 'in which forms of modern power constitute the subject- the developing child' (Marshall 23; Foucault, *Discipline*). Building on Marshall's assessment, Hogwarts pedagogy can be seen as structuring the development of the child as a wizard in terms of allowing child characters increasing access to the secret body of magical information. Harry, at the onset of his magical education, is unaware of what magical concoction 'add[ing] powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood' would produce (Rowling, *Stone* 102). Having grown up in a non-

magical household with no access to wizardly knowledge, these ingredients signify no more than two arbitrary objects for him. It is through the voice of the teacher that he is taught how they are capable of producing ‘a sleeping potion’ when combined together (103). His foil in this regard is Hermione, who *does* have the answer to Snape’s question despite being muggle-born herself (103). Her knowledge, however, is also derived from the written authority of the school textbook, as she proudly tells Harry and Ron at their first meeting that she has ‘learnt all [their] set books by heart’ (79). Learning to be a witch/wizard in *Harry Potter* is therefore constructed in terms of being allowed access to a body of information which expands as child characters advance through their school years.

The Potions classroom episode reinforces this connection between magical empowerment and magical information in even greater force; it is suggested that access to magical knowledge is constitutive not only of magical ability, but of one’s elite magical identity itself. In another attempt to bully him in the same episode where Snape asks Harry where a ‘bezoar’ could be found. Harry’s lack of magical knowledge is then used to belittle his identity as a wizard by the professor, who disdainfully remarks, ‘fame clearly isn’t everything’ (102). The social perception of one’s respectability as a witch/wizard, therefore, is structured from the very first book in terms of the depth of one’s magical knowledge. In *Half Blood Prince*, this particular bit of magical knowledge returns as a metaphor for empowerment with far more narrative urgency; when Ron is accidentally poisoned, Harry saves his life by forcing a bezoar down his throat, because his magical education has now made him familiar with the occult powers of the object to counter most poisons (372-

373). Without access to the academically disseminated magical information, Harry would not *be* a wizard; his social identity as one is structured far more by his participation in magical education, than any innate magical capability. ‘The acquisition of empirical knowledge imparted to the hero by his encounters with the catalogue [of magical experiences],’ Mary Pharr comments, ‘is vital if he is to grow in wisdom as well as in strength’ (59). She goes on to discuss how ‘the Potter boy must learn use and technique from masters,’ if he is to survive as a member of the magical universe (59). The fundamental question of who *is* a witch/wizard is structured thus to a considerable extent in terms of what they *know* regarding secret magical information. Access to this elite body of information is integral to one’s magical identity itself in the books.⁴³

It follows, then, that such an elite body of information, which is constitutive of a privileged identity, must be regulated and controlled closely if its elite status is to be maintained. As a disciplinary institution, Hogwarts not only disseminates, but regulates who has access to the information it closely guards.⁴⁴ This regulatory role is of central importance to the maintenance of the elite status of witches and wizards in Rowling’s books. The magical society’s preoccupation in the narrative to keep Hogwarts, and indeed wizarding society, hidden from muggles portrays magic as a system of exclusionary knowledge. Such a mode of knowledge-system or education empowers its subjects in terms of letting them in on a secret knowledge which only they, as an elite group, are

⁴³ This is further evidenced in the social status of those who could not finish or access magical education, such as Hagrid (Rowling, *Chamber* 184), and Dumbledore’s sister Arianna (*Hallows* 129-130). Lack of access to the complete curriculum of magical education marks them as inferior members of magical society itself. The former is characterised by his unpolished grasp on social etiquette, the latter by her mental instability and tragic loss of control over her own magical ability resulting in her death.

⁴⁴ There are multiple narrative instances of how Hogwarts regulates the dissemination of information, from its magical invisibility to muggles (Rowling, *Goblet* 148) to the mediating journey by Hogwarts Express which is only accessible through a secret portal in Charing Cross station (*Stone* 70-71).

entitled to. Rowling depicts in her narrative several instances of the magical society actively maintaining the secrecy of their existence from muggles. An analysis of these strategies reveals how magical knowledge empowers child characters not merely in terms of offering them greater information about the world, but in terms of a promise that they are privy to information which a large majority of other human beings *are not* allowed to access, thereby perpetuating a hierarchy in terms of who is allowed to know about the greater truths of magic.

1.2.3 Magic as Exclusionary Knowledge: Secrecy and the Elite Status of Magic

The centrality of secrecy to magical life is insisted upon by Rowling throughout her books. Witches/wizards are frequently depicted as interfering and manipulating the lives and communities of muggles, while muggles are pointedly kept ignorant ‘that there’s still witches an’ wizards up an’ down the country’ (Rowling, *Stone* 51). The narrative logic behind this secrecy is framed in Hagrid’s explanation that if muggles were aware of the existence of magic, ‘everyone’d be wantin’ magic solutions to their problems’ (51). In the fourth book, Hermione explains to Harry and Ron how carefully Hogwarts School is kept hidden from muggles.

“It’s bewitched,” said Hermione. “If a Muggle looks at it, all they see is a moldering old ruin with a sign over the entrance saying DANGER, DO NOT ENTER, UNSAFE...or it might have Muggle-repelling charms on it, like the World Cup stadium” (*Goblet* 148).

The secrecy of the disciplinary institution reinforces the secret status of the knowledge it disseminates to its students. Jann Lacoss demonstrates the

structural similarities of the magical world with secretive folk groups, which laboriously work to keep the non-magical people ‘unaware of the very existence’ (69) of themselves. This assessment follows Marcel Mauss’ argument that magic comprises knowledge which is ‘private, secret, mysterious, and approach[ing] the limit of a prohibited rite’ (30) and that such ‘knowledge is really the prerogative of a closed group’ (53). Hogwarts, and its school pedagogy, provides a material image of the locus where this closed group disseminates and shares secret, magical knowledge. Magical information in the books is thus constructed as desirable and empowering in its exclusivity; wizardly children understand that they have access to greater truths, and a greater ability to manipulate that information to exercise powerful magical effects, which a muggle underclass would not be able to do.

Rowling frequently uses the metaphor of magic as a mysterious force to sidestep the possibility of questioning why muggles are excluded from the academic institution of Hogwarts, and thus deprived of the chance to access these greater truths of the world. Much in the same way as the Hogwarts houses are brought to represent certain essentialist and reductive definitions of moral character, Rowling chooses to structure the notion of magical ability or talent in essentialised, inherent terms. While the books themselves only suggest this essentialism indirectly, she explains in her later literature on the subject how only those with an inherent talent can make use of magical knowledge.⁴⁵ In answering a fan question regarding why muggles cannot brew potions, despite

⁴⁵ It is debatable whether an after-the-fact interview can be considered canonical. However, there are subtle hints within the books themselves that some magical ability is required to access even alchemical knowledge. This is evidenced in Hermione’s waving of her wand to speed up the brewing of a particularly difficult potion (Rowling, *Prince* 353).

potentially being able to access both recipes and ingredients, she replies that at ‘some point they will have to use a wand,’ and explains that ‘for a muggle, you need the ability,’ the magical paraphernalia including wands and cauldrons being only ‘a vehicle, a vessel for what lies inside the person’ (Rowling, “An Evening”).⁴⁶ This insistence on the idea that non-magical people are not excluded so much as inherently incapable of accessing the hidden truths of magic shifts the roots of the hierarchy from any external, visible ideology to an essentialist understanding of individual ability. This ideological construction is governed by the neoliberal assertion of hierarchies as unchangeable and dependent on an organic common sense, and is efficiently transmitted through Rowling’s use of the fantasy narrative which, as Rosemary Jackson argues, ‘permits no internal explanation of the strangeness’ of the world (*Fantasy* 16).

Cecire suggests that ‘Rowling’s overlapping Muggle and wizarding worlds is a more pedestrian version’ of C.S. Lewis’ construction of his child characters being able to access Narnia and see the ‘real England’ more clearly than adults, in terms of a ‘spiritual reality, the inner truth accessible’ (208-209). She argues that ‘fantasy asserts that what is most true can never be captured by mere information,’ but requires an innate ability to access that truth (77). Considering the image of magic as an invisible hand, I argue that this ability is governed by an underlying principle which is far less pointedly religious in Rowling’s fantasy than Lewis’, yet maintains a certain mysterious and omnipresent aspect through the metaphor of magic. This aspect fixes an inherent, essentialist lack of magical ability for muggles. The denial of muggles

⁴⁶ This is an essentialist view of talent, which portrays talent as inherent and ontological. As I shall demonstrate in Section 1.3, this formulation is what forms the basis of Rowling’s structuring of a hierarchical worldview as inevitable.

to access privileged information, in this construction, is not depicted as a breach of their freedom, because even if access were to be granted, magic's mysterious denial of ability to them would prevent them from utilising such knowledge.

Argus Filch, the Hogwarts caretaker, is an example of this. In his assistance to Umbridge in tackling a set of unruly fireworks in the fifth book, we are told that being a Squib, he 'could no more have Stunned the fireworks than swallowed them,' and has to take recourse to a simple broomstick, a non-magical object, to combat the magical fireworks (Rowling, *Phoenix* 557). He fails to use magic not because he was denied the use of magic by an institutional authority, but by the workings of the underlying, impersonal magical force itself. His inability is thus depicted as an organic, undetermined, inexplicable chance of his birth.

On the ideological level, this metaphor is involved in the processes by how modern civilisation reinforces definitions of its own rational identity by demarcating those who are banished to the categories of madness and 'unreason.' Foucault explains the notion of 'unreason' by insisting that 'we must understand it not as reason diseased, or as reason lost or alienated, but quite simply as *reason dazzled*...dazzled reason opens its eyes upon the sun and sees *nothing*, that is, *does not see*' (Foucault, *Madness* 101). The 'unreason' of the muggles, compared to superior magical knowledge, is portrayed as the consequence of a similar 'dazzlement.' Muggles are not generally considered to have 'diseased' or 'lost' rational faculties, and are certainly never represented as 'mad.' Their inferiority to wizards, however is reinforced by the notion that they are incapable of comprehending as much about the world as wizards can. Thus, when Harry reaches the wizarding pub which serves as portal between the magical and muggle worlds, he 'had the most peculiar feeling that only he and

Hagrid could see it,’ as the muggles seemed to pass it by, ‘as if they couldn’t see the Leaky Cauldron at all’ (Rowling, *Stone* 54). The narrative thus insists that muggle vision is ‘dazzled’ and therefore cannot access magical truths of the world; even if Hogwarts were to allow the inclusion of muggle students, they would not be able to wield magic.⁴⁷ The secrecy of magical knowledge, kept hidden from muggles, is thus justified by Rowling in her depiction of muggles as inherently incapable. Their exclusion is portrayed to be dependent on the invisible principle of magic’s own mysterious functioning, rather than an originary act of political disenfranchisement.

This contingency of magical education upon an underlying invisible hand is reinforced at the narrative level through the portrayal of teachers who offer constant reminders about the need to adhere to the rules of magic. Discussing the function of magic or enchantment in portal and quest fantasy, Cecire argues that it involves ‘sublime experiences that activate forms of belief or knowledge connected to deep and seemingly timeless meanings’ (13). The unknowability of these underlying meanings proliferates in the texts in the form of the regulations which must be adhered to for the correct use of magic. I argue in the following section that classroom pedagogy at Hogwarts depicts the contingency of students’ use of magic upon the principles which govern it, while simultaneously avoiding this pedagogy from coming across as overly didactic through superficial references to the possibility of innovation and research in magic. These latter references only serve to invoke the ‘independent

⁴⁷ The fundamental incompatibility of magical and non-magical epistemology is evidenced in the assertion that Hogwarts is so saturated with magical energy that any muggle technology would ‘go haywire’ and stop functioning once within the confines of the enchanted castle (Rowling, *Goblet* 476).

curiosity’ of adolescent readers (Sullivan, “Reader Response” 88).⁴⁸ Innovation always takes place conveniently behind the scenes, and the narrative never shows classroom pedagogy encouraging students to innovate on their own.

1.2.4 Hogwarts Pedagogy: The Invisible Rules of Magic

The downloading of information as depicted in *Harry Potter* is accompanied by the teaching of certain conditions and rules within which individuals must act. Mauss contends that ‘magical precepts...enumerate a certain number of dependent observances’ (56). This definition can be applied fruitfully to the metaphor of magic in *Harry Potter*, where the figures of the teachers and their classroom lessons reveal the existence of an underlying status quo which regulates individual action; much like the depiction of Hogwarts as discussed earlier, the magical discipline has rules of its own, and cannot be navigated unless it allows itself to be navigated by actors who adhere to such rules.⁴⁹ Hogwarts pedagogy, as Hopkins contends, is dependent on ‘teaching, and the slow, steady, cumulative acquisition of knowledge’ (28). This knowledge is structured by a disciplinary set of rules and practices, and Harry understands in his first few days as apprentice wizard that ‘there was a lot more to magic...than waving your wand and saying a few funny words’ (Rowling, *Stone* 99). The insistence that magical knowledge is difficult to master, and classroom

⁴⁸ Depictions of such innovation characterise the books in the series meant for an older, adolescent readership. The innovative entrepreneurship of the Weasley twins becomes a minor plot point over the course of their final years (Rowling, *Goblet* 52; *Phoenix* 595; *Prince* 113-117), and Snape’s textbook containing his experimentation features in *Half-Blood Prince* (179-183). These superficial images of innovation invite adolescent readers to identify with characters more as active innovators than a purely didactic depiction would offer, and serve to appeal to their independent curiosity, which is ‘tied to the degree of autonomy they have in representing’ their own identification as active, rather than passive, subjects with reference to the narrative (Sullivan, “Reader Response” 91).

⁴⁹ Rowling provides multiple evidences of this throughout the books, from Cho accidentally setting fire to a friend’s clothes by mispronouncing a spell (*Phoenix* 350), to Ron’s accidental transformation giving himself a handlebar moustache (*Prince* 290), and Neville’s errors in the potions class which turns his brew orange when it was supposed to turn green instead (*Azkaban* 95-96).

pedagogy may be inadequate to uncover its mysterious principles, is portrayed in a classroom scene with Firenze the centaur, who is entirely unsurprised by the failure of students to learn anything concrete:

It was the most unusual lesson Harry had ever attended. They did indeed burn sage and mallowsweet there on the classroom floor, and Firenze told them to look for certain shapes and symbols in the pungent fumes, but he seemed perfectly unconcerned that not one of them could see any of the signs he described, telling them that humans were hardly ever good at this...He was nothing like any human teacher Harry had ever had. His priority did not seem to be to teach them what he knew, but rather to impress upon them that nothing, not even centaurs' knowledge, was foolproof (Rowling, *Phoenix* 532).

Firenze's insistence on the impossibility of wielding complete mastery over magic constructs the image of pedagogy around an unquestioning acceptance of limitations on the use of magic. These limitations are configured in the narrative in terms of an essentialist magical ability which is dependent upon certain principles it must obey, yet never fully understand. That there is more to magic than 'foolish wand-waving' (Rowling, *Stone* 102) is narrated in *Goblet of Fire*, when Barty Crouch Jr., impersonating Professor Moody, teaches the children about the powerful Avada Kedavra curse, which allows a witch/wizard to instantly kill their target (190-191). His pedagogy, however, is accompanied by the warning that knowledge of the incantation is insufficient for effecting this particular spell. The children are told they 'could all get [their] wands out now and point them at [Moody] and say the words, and [he] doubt[s] [he]'d get so much as a nose-bleed' (192). It is subsequently revealed that 'Avada Kedavra is a curse that needs a powerful bit of magic behind it' to

function properly (192). As a narrative device, this representation communicates that magical knowledge cannot be harnessed independent of the underlying principles which regulate such knowledge. The necessity of a ‘powerful bit of magic’ (192) behind the magic spell is not governed by the information that has been downloaded for the child wizard, but by the principles of their innate magical ability itself, which lie outside their subjective control. As Lori M. Campbell argues, as protagonist, Harry’s ‘overarching goal extends far beyond himself’ (*Portals* 182). This goal, to become a competent magical individual in his own rights, extends beyond his subjective ability and is contingent on the invisible hand of magic which gives him this ability to begin with.

The lack of control or even complete understanding over the nature of this magical ability suggests the dangers of transgression with regard to the rules of magic. The Potions lesson in *Prisoner of Azkaban* represents an episode where this danger is affirmed in the narrative. When Neville makes mistakes regarding the quantity of ‘cat spleen’ and ‘leech juice’ to brew his potion, Snape uses the opportunity to bully him further by ordering him to rectify his mistakes by the end of the class, at which point he threatens to ‘feed a few drops of this potion to [Neville’s] toad and see what happens’ (Rowling, *Azkaban* 96). The episode ends optimistically, with Neville being able to correct his errors with some help from Hermione, and his toad Trevor ingesting the potion without being poisoned in the process (97). This episode insists upon the need to follow magic’s principles and rules, as not doing so may result in potentially fatal consequences. ‘As with non-magical human technology,’ Margaret J. Oakes comments, ‘greater power is only achieved through more in-depth instruction and the mastery of the more difficult skills’ (123). While instruction and training

ostensibly transform child characters into more competent users of magic, the metaphor of magic as mysterious is employed by Rowling to often avoid introspection into what these rules are, and how they are enforced. The invisible hand of magic which shapes and often intervenes in human action is described in deliberately vague terms. Thus, when Harry's decision to spare Peter Pettigrew's life culminates in the latter's magical death at a crucial juncture (Rowling, *Hallows* 380-381), exactly *how* magical principles bring about this chain of events is elided in the proposition that 'this is magic at its deepest, its most impenetrable' (Rowling, *Azkaban* 311). The invisible hand of magic here passes judgment on Pettigrew, intervening directly in the narrative as a *deus ex machina* to interrupt individual magical action.⁵⁰

This regulated, contingent mode of magical action is tempered by the superficial images of actors who are innovators within the discipline of magic. However, such innovations always take place behind the scene, without any insight into how the principles of magic can be experimented with. This strategy allows the narratives to avoid overt didacticism, and engage with the 'independent curiosity' of adolescent readers (Sullivan, "Reader Response" 88). As a result, figures of innovation feature with far more frequency in the last three books of the series. An example of innovation is evidenced in the final book, when Dumbledore is accused by 'Ivor Dillonsby [who] claims he had already discovered eight uses of dragon blood when Dumbledore "borrowed" his papers,' which he plagiarised among his 'many magical discoveries'

⁵⁰ This invisible hand of magic as an impersonal regulator of action successfully transforms the coercive vision of an authoritative headmaster 'in his "turret," invisible and unrelenting in his care' (Dingley 5) to a literally invisible, omniscient force. As discussed in Section 1.2, this construction allows Hogwarts pedagogy to be organised as an ideologically regulated discipline with no visible (hence, an unchallengeable) source.

(Rowling, *Hallows* 28). In portraying the headmaster as a scholar-wizard who in his youth had been a great contributor to the magical discipline, Rowling avoids depicting the figure of the teacher as a stultifying didact, rather having Dumbledore claim that ‘to a wizard...there can be nothing more important than passing on ancient skills, helping home young minds’ (Rowling, *Prince* 414). Mendlesohn argues that ‘the modern portal-quest narratives are hierarchical,’ and ‘this hierarchy is frequently encoded in speech patterns’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 6). In giving Dumbledore the voice of wisdom and authority in his explanations of magical principles to child characters throughout the books, and in his insistence on letting Harry discover the world around him by himself, Rowling suggests a headmaster whose ‘moral integrity’ depends on his apparent identity as a scholar and innovator (Bristow 61).

Despite this narrative strategy of implying that others have been innovators, pedagogy at Hogwarts never actually allows for visible practical insight, even at its most desirable portrayal as evidenced in the depiction of Remus Lupin. Rowling introduces Lupin’s philosophy of teaching as deviating from a more didactic model of memorising textbooks, when he requests his students if they would ‘please put all your books back in your bags. Today’s will be a practical lesson. You will need only your wands’ (Rowling, *Azkaban* 99).⁵¹ Throughout the text, Lupin’s private lessons to Harry depend on encouraging him to build on his strength of will in fighting Dementors, as an

⁵¹ Lupin’s first class is ostensibly portrayed as far more exciting than most other classroom pedagogy in the books (Rowling, *Azkaban* 99-106). However, the practical teaching he promises is ultimately restricted to imaginative exercises in transforming an object of fear to an object of humour (101-102). While this process is demonstrated to require a considerable amount of will-power, the underlying principles of magic itself are never explored. The only magical aspect of the lesson, the incantation, is downloaded for the students by Lupin (102), and no further insight into magic itself is provided.

equally important component of magic as knowledge of the incantation (112-116). Rosenberg posits that among the teachers depicted in the books, Lupin ‘is the first teacher to encourage problem-solving skills among students’ (11). The depiction of Lupin as a practical, participatory pedagogue, however, is soon abandoned by Rowling, and proves to be only a superficial strategy to introduce his first lessons. The appeal of his classroom soon begins to be narrated through the books’ strategy of making the content of what he teaches exciting and fantastic, rather than demonstrating any significant consistency in Lupin’s encouragement of problem-solving, as is evident in the depiction of his growing popularity among the child character:

In no time at all, Defense Against the Dark Arts had become most people’s favourite class... His next few lessons were just as interesting as the first. After Boggarts, they studied Red Caps, nasty little goblin-like creatures that lurked wherever there had been bloodshed: in the dungeons of castles and the potholes of deserted battlefields, waiting to bludgeon those who had gotten lost. From Red Caps they moved on to Kappas, creepy water-dwellers that looked like scaly monkeys, with webbed hands itching to strangle unwitting waders in their ponds (Rowling, *Azkaban* 107).

The appeal of Lupin’s pedagogy in this paragraph is constructed through the depiction of the marvellous and strange creatures studied by the children. Lupin is lauded by Joshua Cole for being an exemplary teacher, however his reading restricts itself to Lupin’s behaviour and engagement with his students, not on any willingness to encourage the critical analysis of magic itself (“Lupin” 127-132). While Lupin is certainly more exciting and practical in his pedagogy from the overtly unpleasant didacts such as Umbridge, it is difficult to read in

his portrayal any material development of Hogwarts pedagogy towards divergent thinking, or learning to creatively solve problems by applying the principles which govern the problem in the first place (Mednick 220-232). Instead, his lessons, while depicting students in a more participatory and practical role than other teachers' classes allow them to be, continue to depend on the revelation of new magical information.

The narrative depiction of the possibility of innovations in magic, however superficial, is important for the depiction of arcane knowledge as a discipline, which Foucault contends must allow 'the construction of new statements' (*Archaeology* 223).⁵² New statements are certainly constructed by young wizards, as in *The Half Blood Prince*, Harry discovers Severus Snape's old textbook, where the young and prodigious Snape has utilised his own knowledge about potions, to record alternative, more efficient methods of potion-making, different from what the published text itself prescribes (Rowling, *Prince* 179-183). Harry's access to this wisdom allows him to become the star student of his Potions class, which in turn brings him significant social appreciation from the teacher (181-182). Notably, the serious and academic-minded Hermione is depicted as stubbornly refusing Harry's offer to share this 'unofficial' wisdom, insisting that she would rather follow the authorised, printed instructions (181). At the narrative level, this episode demonstrates the possibility to innovate on and change the strategies in which magic is exercised. In choosing to 'crush with flat side of silver dagger' (180)

⁵² There is thus a dual representation of knowledge in the books. At the narrative level, Rowling preserves the independent curiosity of adolescent readers by offering apparent images of innovation (Sullivan, "Reader Response" 87-90). At the ideological level, however, the principles of magic themselves are never explained, thus keeping the organisation of magical knowledge itself as hegemonic.

the Sopophorous Bean, instead of cutting it as prescribed in the official textbook, Harry deviates from the standard textbook, portraying ‘the proposition of formulating new propositions, ad infinitum’ as an existent aspect of the school pedagogy (Foucault, *Archaeology* 223). This optimistic vision of innovation, however, is undercut by the fact that it is Snape, and not Harry, who is the innovator in this chapter. At the narrative level, this is suggested when continued use of the textbook’s instructions without understanding the principles is criticised and chastised by his friends, who appear to note the danger in this:

He looked around and saw that Ginny had joined them. “Did I hear right?

You’ve been taking orders from something someone wrote in a book, Harry?”

She looked alarmed and angry...

“I just tried a few of the tips written in the margins, honestly, Ginny, there’s nothing funny-”

“Ginny’s got a point,” said Hermione, perking up at once. “We ought to check that there’s nothing odd about it. I mean, all these funny instructions, who knows?” (Rowling, *Prince* 182-183).

The text ultimately confirms Hermione’s and Ginnys’ trepidation when continued use of the book’s unknown spells and tips ultimately gets Harry in trouble for accidentally effecting a dangerous spell which cuts open a fellow student’s ‘face and chest as though he had been slashed by an invisible sword’ (489).⁵³ Thus, the narrative of innovation is ultimately subverted by Rowling as

⁵³ Harry’s ultimate lack of control over the spells he learns from the books is exposed in the climactic scene of the book. As he attempts to curse Snape with these spells, the latter effortlessly defends himself, incapacitates Harry, and mocks him by saying, ‘you dare use my own spells against me?’ (Rowling,

a warning not to trust instructions without understanding the principles behind them.

Magical pedagogy is thus ultimately contingent upon the passive acceptance of certain underlying, yet unknowable, principles. While the disciplinary nature of magical knowledge is hinted at through the figures of innovators, these innovations are never explained. Any proliferation of the discipline of magic is revealed to have always already happened before the focalising character's education. Ideologically, however, such a pedagogy reinforces magical education as constituted by a constant revelation of information and the rules which govern their usage, which requires the subjects to first accept unquestioningly the omnipotence and invisibility of the magical principle which make this information visible. At the same time, this invisible principle also fixes in place wizards as inherently able to work with magic, which justifies the exclusion of muggles from the academy. In the next section, I argue that Rowling avoids moral introspection into this justification by constructing her muggles as an ontological underclass or caste, whose inability to use magic is depicted not as an act of disenfranchisement, but as a perpetuation of an essentialist view of people as fixed in their 'otherness' by the invisible principle of magic which governs her fantasy world.

Prince 563). Snape, the true innovator of the spells, wields mastery over them. Harry, who has simply downloaded them without knowing the principles of innovation themselves, is rendered powerless against his enemy.

1.3. Magic is Might: The Wizard/Muggle Hierarchy as Common Sense

1.3.1 Inferiority and Ignorance

I have argued that Rowling's use of an essentialist vision of ability suggests that muggles suffer from a rational 'dazzlement,' which renders them unable to comprehend the greater body of information unique to the magical realm. Jayetta Slawson posits that 'the Harry Potter books speak to issues of...conflicting ideologies between groups of people' (72). My analysis of the house system has demonstrated Rowling's use of the school story trope of competition, and her adaptation of the same to depict social relations in school life as essentially competitive conflict between groups.⁵⁴ The ideological conflict between wizards and muggles, however, is constructed not so much on the basis of a clash of worldviews, but a conflict between knowledge and ignorance. Thus, when the Weasleys meet Harry's muggle foster family, it is suggested that the latter 'hadn't understood a word of' the formers' everyday magical parlance, and 'clearly thought Mr. Weasley was mad' (Rowling, *Goblet* 44-45). The Dursley's reduction of the incomprehensible discourse of magic to madness narrates, in a somewhat patronisingly humorous tone, the muggle ignorance of the jargon and everyday parlance of the magical society. Even well-meaning muggle characters in the books are at positions of disadvantage in magical society due to a fundamental inability to comprehend magical knowledge.⁵⁵ This ignorance fixes muggles at a disadvantaged position to

⁵⁴ As demonstrated earlier, it is the use of magical omniscience as a metaphor that helps Rowling essentialise this conflict by replacing the abstract notion of divine authority (Winn 64-73) with the literal notion of magical authority, a force which surveys and judges its subjects through its sentient power.

⁵⁵ Thus, for example, when the good-natured Mr. Roberts welcomes the wizards to the camping site for the World Cup, he gets increasingly confused and suspicious at the magical jargon used by Mr. Weasley, and ultimately has to be enchanted by a wizard with cold, clinical patronisation (Rowling, *Goblet* 71-72). Similarly, Hermione's parents are first standing 'nervously' when they first visit Diagon Alley, and later,

wizards socially and psychologically, even when actual magic is not being wielded to control or affect the non-magical population. This is evidenced in Harry's return from his first year of magical education, where he uses his wizardly status to scare his cousin, Dudley:

“Why’re you staring at the hedge?” he asked suspiciously.

“I’m trying to decide what would be the best spell to set it on fire,” said Harry.

Dudley stumbled backwards at once, a look of panic on his fat face.

“You c-can’t- Dad told you you’re not to do m-magic- he said he’ll chuck you out of the house- and you haven’t got anywhere else to go- you haven’t got any friends to take you...”

“Jiggery pokery!” said Harry in a fierce voice. “Hocus pocus...squiggly wiggly...”

“MUUUUUUM!” howled Dudley, tripping over his feet as he dashed back towards the house. “MUUUUM! He’s doing you know what!” (Rowling, *Chamber* 12-13).

This episode portrays Harry, who had been bullied by Dudley for most of the opening episodes of *Philosopher’s Stone* (19-27), having now gained the ability to turn the tables on his cousin by virtue of the latter’s ignorance regarding how magic works. What is important to note from the episode discussed is that in this instance, Harry’s status as a wizard allows him the ability to intimidate Dudley *despite* not using magic to actually cast a spell. His apprenticeship in wizardly society, expressed in linguistic terms, is sufficient in itself to serve his purpose. On the narrative level, this episode is provided as a

they silently accept Mr. Malfoy’s obvious insults, and continue to be passive bystanders to the entire conflict that follows (*Chamber* 47-52). Their silence and passivity in these episodes mark their acknowledgement of their own inferiority in a world they do not fully understand, despite the perfectly friendly welcome they get from the Weasleys.

satisfactory moment of revenge; Dudley's characterisation as a pampered, sadistic child, and his relentless abuse of the protagonist, invites a considerable amount of sympathy for Harry when he is finally able to pay Dudley back. What this moment of intimidation subtly suggests, however, is that it is the lack of Dudley's access to the knowledge about how magic functions, rather than any active use of magic on Harry's part, that fixes him as the latter's inferior by virtue of his muggle status.

To demonstrate how this construction of muggles as ignorant, and innately unable to access magical knowledge, is depicted as a common sense inequality, it is necessary to address two issues. Firstly I argue that muggles are constructed as an ontological underclass, whose inferiority is explained away through the image of the invisible hand of magic which has been discussed in the previous sections. Secondly, I demonstrate the ideological and moral ramifications of this construction on the narrative, and argue that Rowling's depiction of how good characters choose to address this inequality remains problematic in terms of the epistemic violence of acting on the underclass while denying them their voice. The neoliberal ideology of the texts posits as morally sufficient an individualistic model of behaviour, which rejects coercive control of magic, and preserves the invisibility of the hegemony.

1.3.2 Muggles as Ontological Inferiors: The Inevitable Underclass

In the construction of muggles, Rowling avoids any racial physiognomy, overtly suggesting how racial politics which seeks to separate muggles from wizards is irrational and fallacious, depicted as the 'pureblood mania' of bigoted and

unpleasant characters (Sterling-Folker and Folker 118). In the narrative, both wizards and muggles are racially human. While the language employed by antagonists like Voldemort against muggles resonates with the popular rhetoric of racism, the texts are careful to dissociate racial or genetic conditions from the depiction of how magical ability is inherited, for example, through the depiction of Squibs (Rowling, *Chamber* 110-111). The representation of magical children born to non-magical parents, and vice versa, seems to confirm that magical abilities ‘appear to occur at random and do not need the social engineering of either genetic mixing or separation to continue’ (Sterling-Folker and Folker 118). Racial physiognomy in portal and quest fantasies is concerned with the ‘racing’ of good and evil characters, which is the ‘consequence of a rhetoric that posits insight in terms of visual perception’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 12).

Physiognomy is employed by Rowling to structure some non-human characters like the Dementors as visibly horrifying (Rowling, *Azkaban* 65-66), or to visually depict Voldemort’s decline into darkness as his features turn progressively more demonic (*Goblet* 558-559). However, wizards are not presented as racially separate from muggles, as with Tolkien’s Elves, whose magical ability is dependent on their non-human identity as ‘noble, wise, beautiful, deathless beings...not very different from that of angels in popular Christianity’ (Simpson, “Elves” 76). The ontological incapability of muggles to access magic is fixed not by racial difference, but by the invisible hand of magic. This mysterious status quo is offered as the common sense *starting point* for subsequent narratives of autonomy, morals, use/misuse and agency regarding magical empowerment.

Establishing the invisible hand itself as the starting point for moral considerations denies scientific inquiry into the roots of magic, as discussed with regards to magical pedagogy earlier. This strategy allows Rowling to ‘associate ...the condition of the land with the morality of the place’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 3), where all moral questions crystallise around who treats the inferior muggles and how, rather than why their inferiority exists, leading to a superficial, performative model of moral action. Rossi D’Souza identifies the construction of common sense inequality in understanding social divisions in terms of ‘mathematical’ ideologies (21-23). Richard Noss identifies in such ideologies an ‘overwhelming temptation to view the subject matter as given, inevitable, *natural*’ (2).⁵⁶ Given such a natural hierarchy, moral autonomy is necessarily circumscribed within the existing status quo. Because the mysterious functioning of magic structures a natural ability to use magic which muggles do not possess, any narrative mode of engaging with muggles necessarily needs to begin with a common sense acknowledgment of this hierarchy. In such a construction, not only is ‘Harry’s personal quest for identity... bound up with the survival of the wizarding world,’ as Campbell identifies (*Portals* 171-172), but this quest for identity itself is guaranteed by the organic, unchangeable hierarchy of the wizarding world itself.

⁵⁶ Mathematical ideology, in the context of social strata, has been applied most critically to the question of caste as a marker of inherent ability (or lack thereof). Such a vision of castes as ontologically fixed ‘crystallised the hierarchised caste system to facilitate the process of exploitation’ (Dwivedi and Sinha 661). The hierarchised wizard/muggle duality in Rowling’s books is crystallised in the depiction of magical ability as inherent and inexplicable, thus opening up the room for exploitation by the likes of the Death Eaters (Rowling, *Goblet* 108).

This narrative construction of hierarchy as a common sense starting point structures moral behaviour in the books as a superficial, expressivist model of individual action, rather than involving truly introspective, normative moral considerations. Mendlesohn identifies that in Rowling's texts, the vision of 'goodness' is largely offered in terms of 'niceness', where 'we all know who is inferior to whom and treat them nicely because they *are* inferior' ("Crowning," 117). Configuring moral action simply in terms of niceness largely forecloses, through the impersonal and common sense ideology of magic, questions of why muggles are inferior to begin with. Such a vision of moral life, where governing magical principles are unknown yet simultaneously constitutive of all moral action, communicates a regressive and problematic interpretative model of semi-intransitive consciousness- where there is a passive acceptance of the status quo, and 'magical explanations' form the crux of how individuals interpret crises and inequalities, because 'they cannot apprehend true causality' (Freire 13). Just as Hogwarts pedagogy constructs education as downloading of information rather than scientific inquiry, this structuring of morality allows *Harry Potter* to avoid inquiry into a normative view of morality which judges existing moral codes on the basis of rational engagement with the roots of social structures, thus effecting a productively and truly moral introspection.⁵⁷ The denial of inquiry, confirmed through the fundamentally unknowable nature of magic as described, restricts the portrayal of moral action in the books to a largely expressivist model, where individual moral action is

⁵⁷ This vision of morality restricts the possibility of moral action to acting *upon* the underclass, rather than an expressivist introspection into *how* the underclass came to be in the first place (Littler 3-8; Rawls).

dependent on emotional responses which largely inspire a performative, non-introspective morality (Sprigge 307-318).⁵⁸

The expressivist morality of *Harry Potter* reinforces the neoliberal ideology of action as essentially individualistic. This notion of individualistic action is structured through the depiction of the magical impossibility of uncovering any visible political/ideological roots of how the wizard/muggle differentiation first came to be, combined with a social vision of an elite minority in a hierarchical position vis-à-vis an underclass of the majority. The fact that witches and wizards do in fact form a statistical minority is confirmed most notably in Ron's explanation that 'if we hadn't married muggles we'd've died out' (Rowling, *Chamber* 89). In the expressivist moral model of such a society divided into an elite minority and an inferior majority, 'taking individual responsibility for [one's] failures' (Bockman 15) is predicated upon the common sense cultural notion that an individual is *entirely* responsible for her/his position in the social hierarchy. While muggles in *Harry Potter* are certainly not depicted as responsible for their magical inabilities, it is also depicted that there is no remedy for their inequality, as no individual witch/wizard can 'share' magic with muggles.

Sharing magic is solely possible between generations of magical people, but even this is made contingent upon a set of principles that are not entirely explained. The inheritance of magical ability is demonstrated as organic; it is as

⁵⁸ By structuring independent autonomy on strictly individualistic action, without offering the scope of true introspection, Rowling offers an expressivist model of moral action. This model, as Michael Nylan critiques, is guilty of the 'ludicrous constructions as an 'autonomous individual' before analysing ethical considerations' (211).

much a game of impersonal chance as a functioning of the ‘unknowable’ forces of magic. Consequently, when it is revealed that Lily Evans has magical ability, and her sister Petunia does not, the latter can only be offered sympathy from the guardian-figure of Albus Dumbledore (Rowling, *Hallows* 537). There is no possibility of ‘fairness’ or ‘justice’ in redressing her lack of magical power, as there is no original act of denial to redress in the first place. This construction is facilitated by portraying the wizard/muggle binary as ontologically fixed, rather than the result of an act of disenfranchisement or fall from grace. Deets contends that this lack of understanding of the originary roots of magic further complicates Rowling’s demarcation of acceptable use of magic from the unacceptable. ‘The trials of the Death Eaters are deeply flawed,’ he argues, and identifies that such judgments in Rowling’s magical world are ‘almost impossible to conduct in accordance within strict notions of fairness’ (742-743). No challenge to the unfairness of this apparently arbitrary magic itself is made justifiable as a challenge to some original injustice, and magical ability exists as a law unto itself.⁵⁹

This law unto itself is overtly depicted in the books as *fundamentally* beyond explanation. At the narrative level, the texts often refer to the mysterious aspect of magic in terms of the spiritual power of love. At the same time, this force is ostensibly depicted as a yet unexplained form of magic, as there is a

⁵⁹ This function of magic as an autonomous law beyond individual perception is evidenced in the central narrative of Lily Evans’ sacrifice for her son, Harry. Her sacrifice bestows Harry with a mysterious power, referred only vaguely to as ‘love,’ which protects him from Voldemort (Rowling, *Stone* 216). Voldemort’s attempt to magically undo this protection (*Goblet* 570) ultimately backfires on him and leads to his death (*Hallows* 595-596). This chain of events, as commented on by Dumbledore (568), goes on to prove that magic is inexplicable in its judgment and function, and individual efforts to control it shall fail even in the case of powerful wizards like Voldemort.

room in the Department of Mysteries which ‘contains a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human intelligence, than the forces of nature’ (Rowling, *Phoenix* 743). This force, importantly, is also portrayed to be ‘the most mysterious of the many subjects for study that reside there.’ The depiction of this mysterious force which is nevertheless ‘kept locked at all time’ (743) at an institution dedicated to magical research, strongly reinforces the narrative suggestion of the inherent impossibility of understanding magic completely. This is one of most crucial attributes of the metaphor of magic in *Harry Potter*, as it reinforces a narrative assumption that there is no need/method to explain the magical hierarchy any further, as magic itself is inexplicable in its entirety. Further, the theological overtone of this inexplicable force of magic is visibly underlined by the reference to this mysterious entity as love. Andrea Stojlikov identifies Rowling’s moral message of ‘love transcending death’ (146), arguing that this moral insistence is ‘a somewhat distorted but basically transparent Christian conception’ (139). Thus, while Harry’s voluntary sacrifice and Voldemort’s evil arrogance lead to their eventual reward and punishment respectively, what is subtly suggested is that this causality is dependent on the invisible judgment of a magical force which simultaneously denies explanation and demands obedience.

The passive acceptance at the narrative level of this inevitable inexplicability of the very force which permeates all magical life is in keeping with the ideological requirements of a neoliberal governmentality. This ideology ‘believes that the world should be [an] enjoyable place for those who deserve it,’ as Anand Teltumbde argues, and ‘it establishes the inevitability of the

‘underclass’ of those who cannot participate in competition, [and] should survive only as subservient to those who are competitive’ (22). The inability of muggles to ‘participate in competition,’ by virtue of their lack of ontological magical talent, can be seen as informed by a contemporary ‘essentialised conception of intellect and aptitude,’ which ‘primarily assumes an ability which is inborn and either given the chance or not to succeed’ (Littler 4).⁶⁰ In this formulation, the ambiguity of merit and personal ability allows for the proliferation of the cultural notion that a certain part of a population are inferior, and are the underclass for no other reason than that they just are.

This image of natural subservience necessarily restricts the possibility of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ within the realm of how one uses or abuses one’s ‘natural’ power. Teltumbde’s analysis also echoes Foucault’s discussion of modern governmentality. Foucault argues in *The Birth of Biopolitics* that notions of governance in the 20th century have largely moved away from considerations of ‘proper conformity to moral, natural, or divine laws’ to a consideration of the regime of truth or ‘the nature of things’ (18-19). I argued in the previous section that magical knowledge is structured in the books as a body of secret, elite information, without providing the room for scientific inquiry into how such information is actually organised. The roots of the wizard/muggle hierarchy are essentialised as a part of this same network of information downloaded for the child characters, and are similarly denied the possibility of inquiry in

⁶⁰ Ideologically, this assertion of intellect and ability as an essentialist attribute of individuals serves to avoid the socio-economic disciplines which subtly exclude the underclass from the very resources they require to solve their problems, thus maintaining an inequality by design (Fischer 10-27).

demonstrating magic as mysterious.⁶¹ Dumbledore's voice in particular is effective in diverting attention from exactly what constitutes this nature of things in the books. Even during the final episodes of *The Deathly Hallows*, when all has been revealed to Harry, the language used to describe magical power remains saturated in the negative language of mystery rather than a positive assessment of magic, implying that there is something fundamentally undefinable about what magic comprises.

“That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children's tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing. Nothing. That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped.” (Rowling, *Hallows* 568)

An acceptance that the ‘deepest laws of magic’ which mysteriously offer only a minority of human beings magical ability then frames moral action in the books in expressivist terms; morality is shifted from productive discussions about the roots of inequality to individual behaviour towards the unequal. This vision of morality is problematic in that it remains guilty of epistemic violence, in attempting to undertake moral action *on behalf* of a hierarchical underclass without allowing them an equal voice in how that action is planned (Spivak 282-283). I argue in the following section that, through the use of foil characters and

⁶¹ This strategy keeps the roots of the hierarchy impersonal and invisible, thus maintaining the illusion of voluntary authority. In the absence of a visible, coercive figure of authority dictating the hierarchy, young readers can approach the narratives in more positive light. As reader response theory has argued, children as readers respond more optimistically to narratives which offer the vision of an ‘affective citizenship,’ or the relationship between a subject and the state/institution within which he/she functions according to an ‘allegiance...which was freely given’ (Weikle-Mills 36).

their cruelty towards muggles, benevolent paternalism which preserves the invisibility of the hegemony is upheld as the models which structure ‘good’ action in *Harry Potter*. Such a distinction between good and evil once again demonstrates that moral balance in the books is largely concerned with keeping the ideological root of the invisible hand hidden and separated from the figure of any identifiable sovereign authority.

1.3.3 What to Do with Muggles?: Epistemic Violence and Necessary Benevolence

The central moral question of how the magical elite should treat the muggle underclass is fixed entirely from the narrative perspective of wizards and witches. Rowling does not offer any significant focalising muggle character in her books who offer a non-magical opinion on how wizard/muggle relations should be structured. The only non-magical characters depicted with any frequency are the thoroughly despicable Dursleys, and as Minerva McGonagall comments, one ‘couldn’t find two people who are less like [wizards]’ (Rowling, *Stone* 15). Only two chapters in the entire series employ focalising muggle characters, both adults. In the opening chapter of *Goblet of Fire*, an old man named Frank Bryce focalises the narrative, but only serves to dramatise the exposition of Voldemort’s journey back to power (7-19). Similarly, the opening chapter of *Half-Blood Prince* uses the character of the fictional muggle Prime Minister, whose helplessness and ignorance about the magical world only serves to accentuate the growing vulnerability of the weak muggle underclass, whom

wizards assure of protection (Rowling, *Prince* 7-24).⁶² The focalising view in the books therefore always entails the magical protagonist, inhabiting his magical fantasyland, looking outward to the periphery towards muggles who are never participating in the wizard/muggle political relations, so much as they are being acted upon by wizardly actors. Questions of *why* muggles must occupy the periphery are entirely precluded by the ontological fixing of the magical hierarchy, and this preclusion is an ideological effect of epistemic violence which acts *upon* an underclass rather than acting *with* them for their betterment.

Such a spectrum of moral action is firmly situated between the two poles of malevolent oppression and benevolent protection, and provides a problematically individualistic model of moral behaviour, because moral action is portrayed as restricted only to the elite class who have the power to act in the first place. While the ‘good’ wizards are protective of muggles, the simultaneous exclusion of muggles from magical knowledge complicates the legitimacy of such ‘protection,’ which ‘without the knowledge of the law under which one is being protected,’ Susan Hall comments, ‘...puts one in the same position as an animal’ (Hall 152). Up until the sixth book, there is no narrative indication that wizards let the muggle governance know about the laws under which they protect muggles from magical threats.⁶³ When the narrative finally

⁶² The episode with the Prime Minister discussed here reinforces the hierarchy where Rowling constructs muggles as largely helpless and subservient to wizards. The elite, magical society’s conversation with the highest ranking muggle in the UK serves to underline the latter’s obvious inferiority, as analysed in this section with regard to the narrative as well as the language used to describe the contrasting figures (Rowling, *Prince* 7-24).

⁶³ ‘Responsible’ moral action, instead, seems to confine muggles as much in the dark as possible for their own protection. Even when Voldemort’s threat has returned and his followers are actively murdering muggles, official government directives are issued solely to wizards (Rowling, *Prince* 45). Such a depiction of action demonstrates the overall paternalistic hierarchy between the two groups, with priority being given to keeping muggles ignorant..

shows the magical minister meeting the muggle Prime Minister to discuss a crisis, it is made clear that although the wizards are not functioning altogether without the knowledge of the muggles, that knowledge is minimal and only transmissible in times of crisis. The language used during the two ministers' meeting hardly ameliorates the concerns of epistemic violence. Rather than having a dialogue about plans to combat Voldemort, the muggle minister's infantilised concerns and ignorance shape the conversation as an overtly didactic counselling from the magical ministers, who reveal that they have already taken a number of key administrative decisions in the Prime Minister's office without his consent:

“The new secretary in your outer office —”

“I’m not getting rid of Kingsley Shacklebolt, if that’s what you’re suggesting!” said the Prime Minister hotly. “He’s highly efficient, gets through twice the work the rest of them —”

“That’s because he’s a wizard,” said Scrimgeour, without a flicker of a smile.

“A highly trained Auror, who has been assigned to you for your protection.”

“Now, wait a moment!” declared the Prime Minister. “You can’t just put your people into my office, I decide who works for me —”

“I thought you were happy with Shacklebolt?” said Scrimgeour coldly.

“I am — that’s to say, I was —”

“Then there’s no problem, is there?” said Scrimgeour.

“I...well, as long as Shacklebolt’s work continues to be...er...excellent,” said the Prime Minister lamely, but Scrimgeour barely seemed to hear him.

(Rowling, *Prince* 23).

Although Hall's assessment is partially refuted by the insistence that wizards do keep muggle governments informed about the magical world, this exchange frames such conversations about wizard/muggle relationships within an obvious imbalance of power. This imbalance is suggested both in terms of wizards already having taken action without consulting the muggle head of state, and the contrasting use of words to depict the Minister for Magic as a stern, authoritative voice speaking 'coldly' and 'without the flicker of a smile,' and the Prime Minister as a bumbling, somewhat incompetent voice who speaks 'hotly' and 'lamely.' The exchange ends with a plea for help from the muggle minister, desperately saying 'you can do magic! Surely you can sort out- well- anything,' further establishing the skewed hierarchy of power, with the wizards replying, 'the trouble is, the other side can do magic too' (24).⁶⁴ This conversation suggests that while the threat to the muggle world originates in the hierarchical power evil wizards possess over them, the salvation from that threat will also have to come from the good people who hold the same hierarchical power. Evil, and threat of invasion, thus emanates not from 'the hierarchy itself, but only he who occupies its upper reaches' (Mendlesohn, "Crowning" 181).

Since good and evil magical actions are both contingent upon the actors' access to the hierarchical magical ability, morality depends on the form or technology of power with which individual actors approach the hierarchy. As

⁶⁴ The paternalism of this episode is reminiscent of John Locke's conceptions of the innocent citizen. Building on Locke, Courtney A. Weikle-Mills comments on his equation of 'childhood and citizenship' to imagine an innocent 'political subject whose bond to the state was not merely rational, but emotional, associated with qualities that were understood as childish' (36; Locke, *Essay*). Locke's conception of the innocent citizen at least in part influenced the classical liberal conception of protectionist states (Bishop, *Smith*).

demonstrated, the magical society is ideologically involved in functioning through an Ideological State Apparatus and hegemonic control, rather than coercive, repressive state apparatuses of violence and sovereign authority. To maintain the neoliberal hegemony of a common sense inequality of society where different groups compete against each other, 'rationality is not only surrounded by, but also founded on the fundamental unknowability of the totalising...process; the invisible hand is invisible precisely because there can be no totalising sovereign view' (Oksala 125). Voldemort's evil, which the protagonists overthrow, is depicted not only as morally undesirable due to his cruelty and sadism, but also fundamentally irrational because of his totalising view. Instead of governing hegemonically, his intensely narcissistic political desire is largely driven by his personal quest for immortality, to which his project for 'the new world we shall build together' is no more than a political tool (Rowling, *Hallows* 584).

This injustice in the texts thus comprises Voldemort's misuse and perversion of the rationale which the invisible hand of magic constructs. While the Hogwarts houses depict the rational principles of the magical discipline, as discussed earlier with reference to the sorting hat, Voldemort's vision claims that 'there will be no more sorting at Hogwarts School... there will be no more houses. The emblem, shield and colours of my noble ancestor Salazar Slytherin, will suffice for everyone' (586). In totalising Slytherin as the moral source of ideology in his world, Voldemort runs the risk of making the figure of Salazar Slytherin the visible sovereign authority behind his regime, rather than maintain the hegemonically efficient competitive view of social life which the four

houses come to represent in interpellating students.⁶⁵ Voldemort's evil is therefore a mode of governance which is too coercive and repressive to be able to support the neoliberal vision of *Harry Potter*'s political world, where the presence of consensual and voluntary subjects is paramount.

The threat of Voldemort's evil is thus a threat to the fundamental features of the magical status quo, and his final defeat is therefore framed within a restoration of balance in the society. Harry's triumph, instead of seeking to address the roots of his own hierarchical, elite status, is contingent upon his commitment to prevent *abuse* of the empowering status quo, rather than dismantle the status quo itself. The benevolent paternalism of Harry, and the good wizards, towards the inferior muggles, serves to 'naturalise and justify the dominance of the social elites, by suggesting that they alone possess the knowledge and understanding necessary for the protection of society' (Hourihan 64). The triumph of 'good' over 'evil' is framed as a triumph of the 'rationality... founded on the fundamental unknowability' of the 'invisible hand' which governs the world (Oksala 125). Rowling rejects in her moral message the totalising visibility of the ideological roots of repression, in favour of a hegemonic construction of the world which depends on the illusion of objectivity.

⁶⁵ The stark visibility of Voldemort's authoritarianism ensures that the only political route for the survival of a democracy which would tolerate such a sovereign would be to 'give in to the most authoritarian individuals,' because 'the heritability of authoritarianism renders it fixed and immutable' (Solt 710). Voldemort's immortality, and the immortal presence of the founders of Hogwarts including Slytherin, would ensure a magically fixed and immutable regime. This would then stultify the disciplinary regulation of magic, which as analysed, does not flow from the authority of any single individual. The figure of an authoritarian sovereign would be fundamentally incompatible with a society governed by the ideology of an invisible hand.

The paternalistic insistence that magic must be kept hidden from muggles for the latter's own good is reinforced with the visions of Voldemort's torture of muggles as an example of what happens when magic does decide to make itself visible. This rhetoric helps frame the epistemic violence of magically keeping muggles ignorant as a necessary, benevolent act. Rowling shifts the focus of moral action to the intention behind use of magical power on muggles without consent, rather than the epistemic violence inherent in the act itself. Perry L. Glanzer argues that in the books, 'autonomous choices are not considered in and of themselves good or evil; they make sense in Rowling's world only as part of the larger battle going on between good and evil' ("Moral" 526). By making the intention behind the use of magic the decisive factor to judge moral action, Rowling conceals the problem inherent in such action itself. Thus, when the 'good' side enchant Mr. Roberts' memory in *Goblet of Fire* to make him forget the trauma of being tortured by Death Eaters (108), this act of magical intervention is justified by its motive to keep the invisible hand invisible, and to maintain the status quo where muggles are excluded from the horrors which magical society may inflict upon them. The narrative device of framing the subsequent mental damage Mr. Roberts receives from this treatment as largely humorous, shrugged off by Mr. Weasley with a non-committal 'he'll be alright,' and justified by the 'big thing they had to make him forget,' frames this invasion of consent in casual terms as necessary benevolence (130).⁶⁶

Another similar act of memory manipulation to protect non-magical people is

⁶⁶ This right to modify Mr. Robert's memory is therefore justified by a relatively worse alternative, as depicted in the figure of the Death Eaters. This ideological construction of moral action in terms of benevolent paternalism is efficiently transmitted by the 'profoundly undemocratic' ideology of quest fantasies, which 'imply that 'simple' people are inherently incapable of participation in self-government' (Hourihan 64).

framed in particularly powerful emotional language, concerning Hermione's decision to enchant her parents to protect them from Voldemort.

"I've also modified my parents' memories so that they're convinced they're really called Wendell and Monica Wilkins, and that their life's ambition is to move to Australia, which they have now done. That's to make it more difficult for Voldemort to track them down and interrogate them about me – or you, because unfortunately, I've told them quite a bit about you.

Assuming I survive our hunt for the Horcruxes, I'll find Mum and Dad and lift the enchantment. If I don't – well, I think I've cast a good enough charm to keep them safe and happy. Wendell and Monica Wilkins don't know that they've got a daughter, you see."

Hermione's eyes were swimming with tears again... (Rowling, *Hallows* 84)

Hermione's decision is framed as a self-sacrifice, where she is willing to deny herself the identity of a daughter for the mental and physical survival of her parents. Her magical removal of their memory, of course, is exercised without her parents' consent. But the language of her confession to Harry and Ron, as well as their potentially fatal quest which necessitated such a drastic step, confirm the narrative position that acting *upon* muggles without their consent will sometimes prove to be the most moral action possible. The good and evil sides act out of different motivations, but their magical action is dependent on the same status quo. The status quo here represents the invisible hand of magic, which circumscribes and regulates all magical activity. Within such a system, good and evil on an ideological level are depicted as a commitment to keep the invisible hand invisible, as opposed to a totalising effort to make the political power of magical authority visible in the body of a

sovereign. The construction of muggles as ontologically inferior allows to structure its visions of magical activity and moral action as individualistic and hegemonic, where efficient functioning of governmentality remains dependent on the illusion of actors exercising their autonomy out of an internalised, rather than externally visible, ideological understanding of what comprises good action.

Conclusion

I have established in this chapter three narrative functions performed by Rowling's depiction of magic and Hogwarts as the school where magic is disseminated. Firstly, I have demonstrated how Hogwarts School in the books functions as an Ideological State Apparatus in fulfilling three of its central objectives: the establishment of a hegemonic view of a common sense knowledge of magical society as it is given, the interpellation of students into ideological subjects who internalise a view of society as competitive and divided into group identities which they adopt and participate in, and a rejection of any coercive mode of structuring magical knowledge which makes visible the political roots of its organisation. All of these functions are crucial to the neoliberal governmentality which requires subjects who voluntarily participate in competitive socio-economic life, and accept a common sense hegemonic understanding of the invisible hand which regulates society according to its own principles. Secondly, I have demonstrated the depiction of magical education as a downloading of information for students, which appeals to child characters in its offering of access to a magical, elite body of knowledge about the truth of things. Simultaneously, Hogwarts pedagogy impresses upon the characters the need to follow the rules and principles which govern such information, as

transgressions may result in the invisible hand of magic interfering in individual action. This construction uses the narrative emphasis on the fundamental unknowability of magic to deny any room for scientific inquiry into the roots of how magic works. Finally, I have demonstrated that this lack of scientific inquiry then fixes as a moral starting point for the books that wizards and muggles are ontologically different, and the inferiority of muggles is common sense that cannot be explained further. This ontological fixing of muggles as an underclass then structures all moral action regarding wizard/muggle relations in terms of acting upon muggles rather than with them, a mode which subtly conceals its own epistemic violence by portraying as foil the visible, physical violence inflicted upon muggles by the evil side. A hegemonic mode of control, which keeps the invisible hand invisible, is held up as a mode of moral behaviour, rather than a repressive, violent technology of power.

This construction of the invisible hand of magic, whose fundamental unknowability lies at the heart of *Harry Potter*'s narrative logic, circumscribes the moral life of the child characters. The contingency of individual autonomy upon such an invisible hand, which is nevertheless not viewed as personal and politically motivated, but internalised as common sense, is one of the most important aspects of the neoliberal re-configuration of individual action in terms of choice. Having established the ideological process and narrative strategies by which Rowling establishes this invisible hand of magic, I demonstrate in the following chapter how the invisible hand configures much of the characters' action as consumers in the marketplace as similarly contingent upon an underlying rationale which subtly shapes them into neoliberal subjects. I argued in this chapter that Hogwarts as an ISA interpellates students into subjects who

compete with each other voluntarily. In the next chapter, by analysing the construction of the consumer identity of such subjects, I demonstrate how this competition is governed by the individualistic rationale of the *homo economicus*.

CHAPTER 2: The Magical Market: Individual Autonomy as *Homo Economicus*

Introduction: Chapter Outline

I argue in this chapter that Rowling interpellates individual identity in *Harry Potter* as fundamentally a consumer identity, governed by the rationale of self-interest. She achieves this through the narrative strategy of transforming several plot coupons or magical objects into market commodities.¹ This strategy is informed by the neoliberal ideological need to portray ‘individual buying of goods as a barometer of success’ (Littler 81). I demonstrate here that the dual representation of plot coupons (as commodities/magical objects) structures autonomy in the books as contingent upon an underlying economic rationale that has been externally fixed for the protagonists. Superficially, the books offer celebratory images of autonomy in terms of the characters’ freedom to choose from a variety of commodities in the magical marketplace available only to wizards. Magical empowerment is doubly represented in the books as economic empowerment. Especially with respect to the protagonist Harry, this journey from the muggle world into the magical one is framed within his transformation from an impoverished orphan into a celebrity wizard with considerable inherited wealth.

¹ In quest fantasy literature, plot coupons are objects, often magical, which are collected and accumulated by the protagonists before they can ‘cash them in’ during a climactic encounter (Lowe). They are important thematic objects in quest fantasy, because they drive a ‘collect-the-coupon’ narrative, where without first collecting such objects, usually under certain predetermined conditions, the next part of the quest cannot be initiated. They are separate from plot vouchers, which are given to protagonists ‘early in their travels, often with an assurance that when the time comes they will realise its use’ (Clute and Grant 768).

At a less overt level, however, Rowling uses the strategy of framing the child characters' market autonomy within rational, adult guiding voices, as well as depicting commodities as 'objects that contain their own magic' (D.W. Jones 48), to suggest that mastery over such commodities is not entirely controlled by individual will. This hierarchical relationship between adult authority and the autonomy of the child is central to children's literature criticism, and I shall demonstrate how Rowling uses Hagrid and Ollivanders' governing voices to subtly influence Harry's market choices, while maintaining a superficial image of optimism and wonder through the depiction of exotic new commodities which promise magic power (Rowling, *Stone* 56-66). Jacqueline Rose identifies an 'investment by the adult in the child,' which structures a set of adult demands on the child which 'fixes the child and then holds it in place' ("Impossibility" 60). While Rose goes on to explore these demands as a psychoanalytic conception of desire, in the context of my argument, this interplay between adult demand and the child's status is central to how the young protagonist is interpellated into a developing *homo economicus*. I argue that this strategy structures a problematic neoliberal model of identity in the books, which defines itself as always regulated by forces beyond its control, which must be taken as given (Bettache 8-19). I demonstrate here that using the image of the invisible hand of magic, discussed in Chapter 1, Rowling portrays magical autonomy as contingent. Since mastery over a magical commodity depends not only on financial purchase, but also on adhering to the mysterious rules of magic, consumer autonomy (and through it the use of magic) is concretely depicted in terms of a never-ending negotiation with the forces of magic. Such a construction undercuts any possibility of absolute magical autonomy in *Harry*

Potter, framing action as restricted within the ideologically constructed playing field.

The previous chapter argued that the texts interpellate characters into hegemonic subjects. Such subjects willingly participate in wizardly social life, which is nevertheless governed by concealed principles and categories that are pre-set for them. Taking this analysis further, this chapter demonstrates that this interpellation is constructed in terms of the neoliberal economic rationale of individual self-interest, or the *homo economicus*.² This construction serves two ideological purposes. At one level, it transforms wizardly identity into individualistic consumer identity, depicting the market as a primary site of empowerment. I build on an existing scholarship which has identified that ‘the Harry Potter books offer instructions on how to live in commodity culture’ (Teare 335-340), with money and economic exchange structured as central to magical life.³ Using consumer theory which analyses the construction of market desire, I demonstrate how life as active consumers in the books is depicted in a positive light.

² The rationale of the *homo economicus* is not an organic, sociological identity. Rather, it is an interpellated, ideologically constructed set of principles which are targeted at the proliferation of consumer economy, rather than rational individual need. Richard Thaler comments that ‘building models of rational, unemotional agents is easier than building models of quasi-rational, emotional humans’ (140). However, he identifies that in the neoliberal market, people increasingly purchase commodities against their discernible rational needs, and while he ‘would not want to call such choices rational,’ it is clear that individual consumers are driven by *some* plausible desire. As I shall discuss, this desire and rationale are elements of the *homo economicus*, appealing to the consumer through the images of commodities as integral to their social life. The market’s ‘understanding, predicting, and influencing of consumer behaviour’ lies at the heart of the neoliberal economy (Lee et al., “Economicus” 178-187). As I demonstrate with reference to magical commodities, both elements are structured *for* rather than *by* the child consumer for the market, following which they are invited to internalise them.

³ Such criticism has focused on the mathematics of money in *Harry Potter*, analysing how the financial system of the books both mirrors and exoticises real-world banking systems (Barta and L’Ai 210-216; Senior 112-113). Cristina Bodlinger-deUriarte has further interrogated the importance of economic class and merit in the books, and the effects it has on social relations (67-69).

At another level, however, Rowling structures this consumer identity as dependent upon an underlying rationale whose principles must be obeyed. The metaphor of magic is used to portray the magical commodity as possessing some level of sentience. This transforms it into a quasi-object, or ‘a moving actant that transforms those which do the moving because they transform the moving object’ (Latour 381). The narrative images of magical quasi-objects, which resist or influence the consumer’s use of them, literalise what Marx identifies in consumer culture as ‘a material shape [of commodities] which is independent of their control and their conscious individual action’ (*Capital* 187). Consequently, the rationale which drives individual autonomy in *Harry Potter* is structured as contingent upon the sentience of the commodities themselves. As with the wizard-muggle hierarchy analysed in Chapter 1, Section 1.1.4, the inexplicable and invisible hand of magic influences consumer autonomy, without offering any real insight into how its principles function.

I divide this chapter into four major sections. Firstly, I analyse the depiction of the magical market in Diagon Alley to demonstrate that it frames magical empowerment in economic terms, and offers images of consumer choice as markers of individual freedom. Plot coupons like the magic wand and books of spells usually feature in quest fantasy as ‘typically magical objects, which the characters must collect’ (Clute and Grant 767). Rowling, however, depicts them as market commodities, which replaces the act of collection with the act of purchase. Through this strategy, she fixes consumer autonomy as the marker of her characters’ individual freedom. At the same time, through the adult voices of Hagrid, Ollivander, and Hogwarts authorities, she suggests the contingency of this freedom upon an underlying rationale which the child hero

must be educated in. Thus, while Harry's autonomy is depicted as a liberating and empowering assertion of his buying power, the notions of what he can buy and how much he must pay are already pre-set for him by adult authority. Secondly, I argue that Rowling depicts characters as willing participants in consumption by portraying certain commodities as desirable and highly sought after.⁴ This section focuses on the broomstick, the most important object in magical school life. The narrative highlighting of childrens' emotional desire for the broomstick, ignoring adult voices of concern about the potential dangers of such objects, offers a problematic model of responsibility. Rowling portrays a superficially optimistic image of child characters exercising autonomy and taking personal responsibility for their use of desirable objects, while subtly concealing how the circumstances of such desire are structured by the market in the first place.

Having thus demonstrated how consumer autonomy and desire are constructed in the books, I analyse in the third section the depiction of commodities as quasi-objects with a magical will of their own, frequently disrupting the consumers' efforts to use them. I argue that Rowling uses this depiction to structure consumer activity as contingent upon the principles of the magical discipline. Overstepping those principles denies individuals their autonomy and consent when their magical commodities refuse to be used by them. Finally, I focus on the depiction of certain commodities whose purchase and use normalise this denial of autonomy as an accepted part of magical social

⁴ This strategy allows Rowling to engage directly with her readers, drawing upon their real-world experience of commodities, and inviting them to identify with this familiar model of consumer culture. Relatability, and familiarity with actions within one's peer group, have been ascertained to be positive factors behind increasing readerly curiosity (Merga 472-482).

life. Much as the lack of consent in the magical governance of muggles demonstrated in Chapter 1 Section 1.1.4, the problematic notion of manipulating and bypassing individual consent as part of wizardly life is demonstrated in the portrayal of love potions and polyjuice potions as commodities. I demonstrate in this section the narrative strategies used by Rowling to normalise the denial of consent. This normalisation is not coincidental, but informed and perpetuated by the neoliberal ideology of self-interest.

2.1. Diagon Alley: The Magical Commodity and Contingent Autonomy

2.1.1 The Marketplace as the Site of Empowerment

To transform plot coupons into objects purchased rather than collected by characters, Rowling uses the magical marketplace as the site of empowerment. The introduction of Diagon Alley serves as the first instance of Harry's movement from the muggle to the magical world. In *Philosopher's Stone*, he enters this space as he 'passes through a portal' (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 1) into the magical world, guided by Hagrid (Rowling, *Stone* 56). In fantasy texts, portals are 'likely to be warded- woven round with conditions and prohibitions,' and only someone with the right, 'whether through birth or actions or some other merit,' may pass through (Clute 776). The hidden door to Diagon Alley serves this purpose in the text; the entrance to the magical world is depicted as a guarded secret among wizards (Rowling, *Stone* 55-56), and Harry is allowed to pass through due to the inherent merit and birthright of his wizarding identity. The only other mode of travel to Diagon Alley is by Floo Powder, as depicted later in the second book (*Chamber* 41), and is also exclusively available to wizards. Rowling portrays Diagon Alley as a 'marvellous realm,' insulated from

muggle life, and guarded by portals through which Harry is initiated into ‘an absolutely different, alternative world’ (Jackson, *Fantasy* 25).

The new, fantasy world entered through a portal functions not as an entirely ‘exotic space,’ but ‘as a new horizon of expectations’ within the world inhabited by the protagonist (Byrne, *Fantasy* 185).⁵ These new expectations, as Harry encounters them in his first entry into the world of magic, are not simply fantastic, but distinctly economic in nature (Rowling, *Stone* 56-66). Unlike other, classic texts of portal-quest fantasy, Harry finds himself not ‘in the middle of a wood at night time,’ (Lewis, *Lion* 4), or the underground haven of a wizard (Garner, *Brisingamen* 38). Instead, he passes through the portal into a market district where magical commodities are up for sale. The entry into the magical world, therefore, is framed as the entry into a new economic space where the protagonist can function as a consumer. This is reinforced in the portrayal of Harry’s inheritance of a magical legacy from his parents, not only as the revelation of his true wizardly heritage, but also in very concrete, financial terms. Confined to a cupboard under the stairs by his surrogate family and forced to carry out menial jobs with little or no pocket money, Harry’s financial anxiety is alleviated by Hagrid, who reveals to him that his parents have left him a substantial inheritance in a bank in Diagon Alley (Rowling, *Stone* 56-58). This moment of inheritance, which transforms the figure of Harry from a helpless orphan to a rich wizard, overtly defines Harry’s ‘coming into being’ in terms of economic power.⁶ Rowling uses the stark contrast of Harry’s financial

⁵ The portal acts as the barrier between these two sites, and ‘entry, transition, and exploration’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 2) through it opens up a new ontological and epistemological world of new, usually increased expectations and opportunities.

⁶ The figure of the orphan has been used, most popularly since the Victorian period, to represent a number of social and emotional themes. Harry’s journey, which begins as an orphan of war, and

deprivation and starvation under the Dursleys' regime to his financial inheritance in Diagon Alley to highlight the economic aspect of his emancipation, serving as the first step in the hero's coming of age (Pugh, *Harry* 50-62).

The Diagon Alley episode also serves to frame Harry's first encounter with the magical world by observing the economic behaviour of witches and wizards as consumers, not simply 'workers and citizens,' in the magical world (Littler 81). As Hagrid guides him through the shopping street, the magical world is revealed through images of new, exotic commodities being sold and purchased by people:

Harry wished he had about eight more eyes. He turned his head in every direction as they walked up the street, trying to look at everything at once; the shops, the things outside them, the people doing their shopping. A plump woman outside an Apothecary was shaking her head as they passed, saying, "Dragon liver, seventeen Sickles an ounce, they're mad" (Rowling, *Stone* 56).

My analysis of Diagon Alley as the site where the protagonist is initiated into the magical world, and the transformation of magical objects into commodities, demonstrates two ideological implications of this strategy. Firstly, I argue that Rowling's depiction of some critical plot coupons like magic wands as commodities to purchase, rather than just collect, is motivated by the

continues with his gradual reacquisition of his magical inheritance, portrays him 'as a figure of hope [which] embodies widespread notions of self-improvement' (Gymnich 3). Further, the role of the orphan in contemporary fantasy, which draws upon myth, serves another purpose. The 'orphan as a person of unknown or unrevealed origins, but endowed with graces that render him/her a communal benefit or a blessing for others is a rare but lately re-surfacing figure that also ostentatiously refers back to the ancient mythology of the foundling' (6). Harry's triumphant return to the magical world, where he does ultimately prove to be the blessing for others by ridding the world of the dark lord, is framed in this episode. The simultaneous economic inheritance that he acquires is thus presented in overtly optimistic and emotional terms, assisted by the affective attraction of the orphan narrative.

neoliberal ideological need to reconfigure individual identity fundamentally as consumer identity. Using this construction, Rowling perpetuates the neoliberal discourse where ‘the idea of choice is connected intimately to our understanding of ourselves as free...we have become enraptured by the idea that more choice means more individual freedom’ (Sugarman 105), whereby consumer autonomy and power becomes the chief marker of choice in socio-economic life. In contemporary neoliberal society, with this remarkable penetration of commodity culture into socio-economic life, the depiction of plot coupons as being purchased rather than collected has been used in young adult fantasy texts, which make economic survival the basis of the hero’s survival itself. Conor Kostick’s *Epic*, for example, is set in a future New Earth, where all individuals play a simulated game.⁷ Purchasing plot coupons and meeting production targets in the game is crucial for economic survival, as the protagonist Erik finds out in the opening pages of the book (7-15). Rowling uses a similar strategy in making economic behaviour central to how the characters exercise autonomy.

Secondly, I argue that this freedom to choose is made subtly contingent upon certain underlying principles and guidelines, the validity of which are passively accepted without enquiry. Through the adult guidance of Hagrid in the first few books, and through Hogwarts shopping lists and regulations over the course of the series, an economic rationale is constructed for the characters,

⁷ Kostick’s narrative provides a good counterpoint, because it is written following the popular Dungeons and Dragons game, which is almost entirely predicated on the collection of plot coupons. Like Rowling, Kostick too makes purchase, and not collection, the mode of acquiring these coupons. With a more dystopian tone than *Harry Potter*, *Epic* makes economic concerns the central motivator of his quest, and connects it integrally with social relations between characters (228-233). A more optimistic story, which can be considered as a counterpoint, is *Bank* (2020), where each chapter documents a group of middle school students attempting to introduce a specific banking scheme in their school. Money is used as currency, but the commodities on exchange are exclusively drawn from children’s social culture (Quigley).

within whose ambit they consume the magical commodities.⁸ Further, the value of commodities is fixed on the ‘brand’ identity of their producers, whose authority derives from their well-trained, adult expertise. By depicting Harry as accepting both downloaded information about what he must buy, as well as the values fixed for him by authorities as brands, Rowling fixes the autonomy of the child wizard as necessarily contingent on the rules set for him by more knowledgeable adults. This structuring is informed by a distinctly neoliberal model of economic life, where ‘many of our choices are preconfigured to preclude more fundamental choices’ (Sugarman 105).

2.1.2 The Wand as Plot Coupon/Commodity: Autonomy as Buying Power

Rowling portrays Harry’s access to the market not only as his first introduction to the magical world, but as a crucial precondition to his magical education itself. Before attending Hogwarts, students are required to arm themselves with magical clothing, devices, and accessories from wizardly shops (Rowling, *Stone* 52-53). These objects thus function as plot coupons, which child characters collect ‘till it’s time to cash them in’ at the magical school (Lowe). Without the acquisition of these objects, the next phase of Harry’s magical journey cannot proceed.⁹ The presentation of some of these most important magical objects as commodities frames the acquisition of magical

⁸ Hagrid guides Harry through his first visit to Diagon Alley (Rowling, *Stone* 56-66), but on a more subtle level, he starts preparing Harry’s rationale about market activity through indirect advice from their very first meeting. He introduces him, for example, to the usefulness of owls as pets (49-50), which he then follows up by gifting him an owl, dismissing the possible choices of cats or toads as irrational (62).

⁹ I focus in this chapter on the commodities in the marketplace, for an economic analysis of the *homo economicus*. However, there are of course more traditional plot coupons which are collected rather than purchased, most notably the seven Horcruxes, the cumulative collection of which are crucial to Harry’s ultimate triumph over Voldemort (Rowling, *Hallows* 594-596). There is a third category of plot coupons acquired by Harry, the ones he receives as gifts from peers and mentor-figures. The social implications of these instances of gift-giving shall be discussed in Chapter 3.

power in terms of consumer activity. This framing strategy perpetuates the neoliberal centralising of the commodity as *the* fundamental unit of socio-political life.

The magic wand is one such plot coupon, giving the ‘holder disproportionate power’ (Clute 767) over non-magical people, which Rowling depicts as a market commodity. It is singularly depicted as the most important conduit of the individual’s magical power, and thus is the object that is characterised more than any other as *the* site, symbol, and instrument of power in the world of *Harry Potter*. Torbjorn L. Knutsen notes that ‘the wand is the distinguishing tool of the wizard... through the wand, the wizard can gain access to the *mona* of the world’ (201). The wand has been depicted in literature as a tool of magic as early as Homer’s *Odyssey*, which depicts the sorceress Circe ‘with her wand held high in hand’ (Homer 167). In modern quest fantasy narratives on magic, the depiction of wands (or their counterpart, staves) varies from book to book. In certain texts, they are depicted as unique objects of great power, such as the wand possessed by the White Witch in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. She derives her authority from the unique, unparalleled power of her wand, notably when she rallies her forces to battle by saying, ‘we will fight. What? Have I not still my wand?’ (Lewis, *Lion* 72). Other texts depict staves or wands as rewards for students of magic who have passed certain examinations (Le Guin 95). In *Harry Potter*, however, wands are neither unique nor acquired after an examination, but purchased at the magical marketplace as commodities (Rowling, *Stone* 63-65). This strategy depicts the use of magic as contingent upon underlying economic structures; the wand is the central tool of

magical empowerment, but the acquisition of that power depends on buying ability as a consumer in the first place.

The importance of money and purchasing power to the use of magic is overtly highlighted in the second book, when Ron breaks his wand, but his parents refuse to buy him a new one because they felt ‘it’s [his] fault [his] wand got snapped’ in a misadventure (Rowling, *Chamber* 74). The implications of working with a broken wand are then portrayed in his failure to use magic properly:

He had patched up his wand with some borrowed Spellotape, but it seemed to be damaged beyond repair. It kept crackling and sparking at odd moments, and every time Ron tried to transfigure his beetle it engulfed him in thick gray smoke that smelled of rotten eggs (74).

This grotesque depiction of magic gone wrong, further reinforced in an episode where a humiliating spell backfires on Ron when he tries to use it (87), frames his failure to wield magic as contingent upon his access to money. The importance of purchasing power in acquiring a wand, or replacing a damaged one, sets it apart from plot vouchers.¹⁰ Examples of objects functioning as plot vouchers in the texts are the Golden Snitch Dumbledore leaves to Harry, which only reveals its secret when he is nearing death (Rowling, *Hallows* 559), or the Monster Book of Monsters gifted to him by Hagrid, which he cannot open until

¹⁰ These are different from plot coupons. While the hero already knows why he needs to acquire the coupon, and how he needs to use them, vouchers are usually received ‘with an assurance that when the time comes they will realise its use’ (Clute 768). Thus, plot-coupons are almost exclusively given to the hero by a higher authority, and this gift-giving cements a relationship of trust and guidance between the hero-as-initiate and mentor-as-instructor. Chapter 3 explores the social implications of this category of gift-giving in detail.

Hagrid shows him how to (Rowling, *Azkaban* 86-87).¹¹ However, the magic wands, and other accessories and ingredients including apothecary items purchased at the market, are acquired by the characters precisely because they *are already told* they need them for their education. There is thus an emphasis on the centrality of an economic rationale behind the characters' acquisition of magic objects. 'Money is always a concern and often a worry in Rowling's world, as we might expect,' writes Teare, 'since expensive accessories of magic-spell books, cauldrons, potion ingredients, wands- must be purchased before any magic can be performed' (340). To perform magic, one must first learn to be a consumer. Training in the use of magic as an apprentice wizard in the books presupposes learning to exercise buying power in the market to acquire commodities. Rowling depicts through the contrasting buying powers Ron and Harry have, and the consequent difference in the performance of their magic, the presence of real-world economic inequality, and its expression in social relations among peers (Bodlinger-deUriarte 67-69).

This importance of buying power is evidenced in the frequent concerns of the Weasleys, who are not very well-off, regarding the purchase of plot coupons for their children. Thus when the school shopping list outlines a list of new books needed by the students, George Weasley immediately points out that 'Lockhart's books are expensive.' The response to this concern is offered by his mother, who suggests that they buy some of his sister's books secondhand

¹¹ Other examples of plot vouchers Rowling portrays are the locket of Slytherin which Harry does not realise is a fake until it is too late (*Prince* 569), the vanishing cabinet which, unknown to Harry, is what he had been looking for throughout the year (548), and the 'ugly tiara' which later reveals itself to be the priceless Lost Diadem of Ravenclaw (*Hallows* 498-499). An example of what I term a 'delayed plot voucher' is the mirror Sirius gifts Harry (*Phoenix* 462). Although the former explains how to use the mirror, Harry forgets about it at a crucial juncture which leads to Sirius' death (710). When the mirror ultimately functions to save Harry's life, he is ignorant until much later exactly how that came to be, thus making it function more like a plot voucher (*Hallows* 451).

(Rowling, *Chamber* 38). The purchase of commodities, and the identification of the self as a consumer with a certain degree of buying power, perpetuates the neoliberal reconfiguration of cultural identity. Since the 1970s, neoliberal governance in the UK as elsewhere has been involved in ‘secur[ing] consent’ of citizens, through an ‘appeal to consumerism as offering a general mode of participation in public life, inviting people to identify with the notion of themselves as consumers rather than as workers or citizens’ (Littler 81). The Weasleys’ episode is an example of this conception of consumer identity, where the commodity is re-imagined and promoted in popular socio-cultural imagination as the chief locus of individual autonomy. Thus, from the Marxist understanding of ‘the singular commodity...as the *elementary form* of wealth’ (Dragstedt 7), the commodity in neoliberal governmentality is also transformed into the elementary signifier of autonomy.¹²

This reconfiguration is necessary for the perpetuation of the neoliberal ideological vision of the books. Clive Hamilton argues that with the advent of neoliberalism, ‘the demolition of the [older] social customs and moral rules did not create a society of free individuals. Instead, it created an opportunity for marketers to substitute material consumption and manufactured lifestyles for the ties of social traditions’ (55). Sugarman locates this substitution of ‘manufactured lifestyles’ for ‘social traditions’ in the fragmentation of

¹² The centrality of wealth and financial ability is crucial in such narratives of autonomy. In *Epic*, which follows a similar ideological narrative strategy of centralising economic accumulation to social life, events unfold in the same manner. In a climactic episode, an agreement central to the final conflict between Erik and a former enemy Svein is founded upon the latter’s negotiations for enough wealth to return to his position of power. Svein perceives his erstwhile autonomy as having been denied him by the Central Allocations Committee, and this concern manifests itself primarily in an anxiety about wealth (Kostick 228-233). Bargaining between characters for autonomy thus frames concerns about financial ability. In both these texts, the importance of buying power in acquiring necessary plot coupons for the characters’ progress reconfigures them as consumers.

individual psychological life under the neoliberal organisation of the marketplace. As he posits, ‘buying and wearing of brands has become our way to belong, find our place, and lend coherence to our identities’ (109).¹³ Thus, while critic George M. O’Har argues that ‘there is a deliberate contrast between the world of technology, and the consumerism for which it is responsible, and the world at Hogwarts’ (863), my analysis of the magical object as a commodity complicates this reading. By transforming a fundamental tool of magic like the wand into an artefact only obtainable through buying power, Rowling does not portray ‘a conflict between technology and magic’ (863), but subtly makes the use of magic contingent upon a less visible rationale of consumer power.

The magical school structure, which necessitates the *economic* purchase of new magical paraphernalia every year, serves to remind characters of this *social* identity as magical consumers. Building on the work of Emile Durkheim, Igor Kopytoff posits that modern societies configure ‘the world of [commodities] on the pattern of the structure that prevails in the social world of its people’ (90; Durkheim, *Religious*). The social world of wizards in the books presents itself through markers of wizardly identity including the wearing of robes, cloaks, and hats, use of arcane ingredients to concoct potions, or access to broomsticks and floo powder for magical travel. All these magical markers of their identity, however, are purchased with money, thus framing wizardly social identity within the economic world of commodities. This is evidenced in the

¹³ This pervasive movement of neoliberal governmentality from an economic principle to a regulatory force in social and moral human life, sets it apart from classical liberalism. While in the latter, individual labour was considered a commodity for sale, neoliberalism reconfigures every aspect of individual identity as a brand unto itself. Contemporary cultural criticism has investigated this transformation, and its pervasive effects on erstwhile organic, sociologically structured human relationships (Bockman 16-17; Ganti 89-104; Hong 56-67).

third book when Harry's return to another year at school requires a planning of his financial activity first:

There were, however, things that Harry needed to buy. He went to the Apothecary to replenish his store of potions ingredients, and as his school robes were now several inches too short in the leg, he visited Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions and bought new ones. Most important of all, he had to buy his new school books, which would include those for his two new subjects, Care of Magical Creatures and Divination. (Rowling, *Azkaban* 44)

There are alternatives to this mode of purchasing plot coupons depicted in the books. Some commodities can be bought second-hand, or gifted to others by original purchasers (see Chapter 3), but the image of economic transaction itself remains central as a guarantor of quality. While Ron inherits his brother Charlie's old wand rather than buying one (*Stone* 75), this 'very battered-looking' product is revealed to be 'chipped in places' with unicorn hair nearly poking out (78-79). Harry, who has been able to buy his own wand for a good price, gets a superior and more desirable specimen made of 'holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple' (65). As an 'otherwise standard sidekick' to Harry (Campbell, *Portals* 176), Ron's acquisition of second-hand, inferior commodities is frequently a source not only of practical problems (as with the faulty wand), but of social embarrassment and inferiority. Hamilton contends that 'the defining feature of late consumer capitalism has been the penetration of market values into areas of social and personal life' (55). This penetration is pointedly portrayed by Rowling, who makes financial ability to buy better products the source of personal dilemmas, offering a poorer character lesser social autonomy. In the fourth book, this is evidenced when Ron receives

an unattractive robe with a 'mouldy-looking lace frill at the collar,' while Harry receives a far more attractive one (Rowling, *Goblet* 139).

"Everyone wears them, Ron!" said Mrs. Weasley crossly. "They're all like that! Your father's got some for smart parties!"

"Well, they're okay!" said Ron angrily, looking at Harry's robes. "Why couldn't I have some like that?"

"Because . . . well, I had to get yours secondhand, and there wasn't a lot of choice!" said Mrs. Weasley, flushing. (139-140)

Market value, and buying power, define social autonomy in this episode, as the Weasley's inferior consumer ability affects Ron's ability to gain social prestige among his peers. Throughout the book, the inferiority of his cheap dress robes deny him social status in terms of being publicly ridiculed (149-150) and by reducing his romantic attractiveness to a potential partner at the school dance (359). Teare argues that 'Rowling's children are fully exposed to the temptations of commerce in the magical world' (341). To build on this argument, these temptations of commerce offer the very locus for characters to exercise autonomy, as the purchase of commodities is located at the heart of social life. However, such autonomy in purchasing commodities is rational rather than arbitrary, and individual autonomy is ultimately made contingent upon an underlying set of principles. While Harry enjoys more autonomy in acquiring a more attractive dress robe, the acquisition of the commodity itself is made mandatory for him by a greater authority, as 'it says on your school list that you're supposed to have dress robes this year' (Rowling, *Goblet* 139). As Campbell demonstrates, 'in a series where the main character must repeatedly

choose' from a set of options available to him, 'no one ever gives Harry the *option* of whether or not to' engage in the process of choice-making itself (*Portals* 178). This exclusion of a fundamental choice, concealed by a more superficial proliferation of choices, evidences the neoliberal ideology of Rowling's fantasy. For neoliberal governmentality, consumer choice is structured not so much as an absolute use of independent buying power, but the internalisation of a rationale which dictates the correct methods of using buying power (Sen, *Ethics* 10-15).

Rowling depicts characters as internalising this rationale of consumption, as I demonstrate in the following section, thus making their autonomy contingent upon certain principles of adult guidance. Kostick uses a similar narrative strategy in depicting his protagonist as initially contingent upon adult regulation, as 'his own parents considered him a child still, untrustworthy and unequal to a discussion on a future' (11).¹⁴ Harry's introduction to the marketplace is regulated by adult guiding voices as well, and his understanding of the value of commodities derives from the authority wielded by the adult producer as a 'brand.' I demonstrate how both these strategies structure a model of economic rationale that is externally governed, rather than organically rationalised.

¹⁴ Kostick places his child protagonist, like Harry, at the initial position of an economic *tabula rasa*; an immature member of the economic society with neither purchasing power nor the rationale to use it efficiently. Unlike his protagonist though, Harry received a lump-sum of purchasing power, but it is framed within the internalisation of external rationale, rather than as a genuine *bildungsroman* (Rowling, *Stone* 56-66).

2.1.3 *Homo Economicus* as External Rationale: Regulation of Autonomy and Value

Having established consumer power as the marker of individual autonomy, Rowling portrays consumer behaviour as practical and regulated by hegemonic economic principles. Freedom of choice in neoliberalism needs to be made contingent upon certain external regulators, if it is to be considered rational. Amartya Sen finds it ‘hard to believe that internal consistency of choice can itself be an adequate condition of rationality’ (Sen, *Ethics* 13). By analysing the role of guides who download information about the market for Harry in the books, it can be demonstrated that his rationality is guided not by his organic, ‘internal consistency of choice’, but by an adult supervisory and regulative voice which must necessarily teach him how to be autonomous in a specific, mandated manner.

Rowling uses Hagrid as the guide-figure who first leads Harry into the magical world, and employs his voice as a medium to set out for the hero a set of principles he must adhere to. Regardless of the plethora of magical commodities available in the marketplace, the young protagonist is still chaperoned by the adult, and the latter’s voice regulates the former’s choices, most notably when Hagrid deters Harry from purchasing a book of spells to curse Dudley (Rowling, *Stone* 62). Similarly, the disreputable shopping street Knockturn Alley is depicted in *Chamber of Secrets* as devoted to ‘dark magic’, which lies on the margins of the legal, moral magical society (Rowling, *Chamber* 42-45).¹⁵ As a

¹⁵ Rowling presents several other instances of authoritative/advisory figures dictating consumer choices. These vary from Hermione’s purchase of sugar-free candies, because her parents are dentists, (*Goblet* 30), Ron’s choice of a new wand when his family receives a windfall, governed by its economic importance (*Azkaban* 13), and Mrs. Weasley’s complaints when her twin sons wish to accumulate joke items (*Goblet* 55-56).

result, it is largely off-bounds to the child characters, and its undesirability is reinforced, much like Diagon Alley, through the use of affectively charged descriptions of its grim and macabre environment, as well as adult admonition (once again in Hagrid's voice) that a reputable child 'don't want no one ter see [them] down there' (45). Harry, as the naive newcomer to the magical world, accepts his advice without question, and internalises this rationale.

Mendlesohn identifies 'didacticism and elaboration' as the markers of this strategy, in which 'while much information about the world is culled from what the protagonist can see...history or analysis is often provided by the storyteller' (*Rhetorics* 7). While the exotic and colourful depictions of magical commodities helps Rowling depict Diagon Alley as a fascinating magical space at the narrative level, Hagrid's voice offers Harry a set of 'received truths' (7).¹⁶ This strategy makes his ability to exercise consumer choice contingent upon downloaded, passively accepted guidelines. Harry's wide-eyed wonder at the entirely new, fascinating magical world is portrayed to set up Diagon Alley as a 'marvellous' space. Within that space, the adult guide possesses an 'authoritative, knowing voice' (Jackson, *Fantasy* 19), and uses that authority to lay out certain rules that have already been fixed for the hero to follow.

Ideologically, this framing perpetuates the neoliberal interpellation of individual consumers, where 'despite endless proliferation of matters over which choice can be exercised and options available, many of our choices are

¹⁶ This is an exercise of what Maria Nikolajeva terms aetonnormativity (*Power* 10-32), or a skew in the age and experience between adults and children when it comes to subjective authority. Hagrid's benevolent yet authoritative guiding voice leads Harry into a magical world, and the latter's gratitude compels him to voluntarily follow the gamekeeper's lead and internalise the rationale Hagrid offers him externally. The child's willingness to be 'written' into the adult's story (Townsend, *Essays* 13) is visible in this episode. The willingness frames this experience as voluntary and optimistic, rather than overtly didactical.

preconfigured to preclude more fundamental choices' (Sugarman 105). The downloaded guidelines child characters adhere to are representative of the underlying economic rationale which prefixes certain necessities for the individual buyer. Thus, Harry's visit to the magical marketplace is contingent upon his having been admitted into the magical institution, regulated by the presence of an adult voice, and no matter what type or category of magic wand or cauldron he chooses to buy, he cannot 'choose not to choose' (105). Hagrid himself is not the sole voice of authority here, as Harry is equally restricted and regulated by the official shopping list. As a document sanctioned by the Ideological State Apparatus of the school, it makes the purchase of certain commodities compulsory for the child character, and also forbids them from buying certain others through reminders to parents that 'first years are not allowed their own broomsticks' (53). This adult regulation reveals Harry's development as a young wizard to be framed in economic terms as an aspiring *homo economicus*. Since this rationale is externally fixed for him by pre-existing structures, his journey fails to be an efficient, true *bildungsroman* despite the optimistic tone of the Diagon Alley episode. Hagrid's relationship with Harry is deeply predicated upon the dynamic of mentor and obedient student, and reveals the power imbalance between them which governs Harry's growth. This episode functions in terms of the adult-child hierarchy outlined by Jacqueline Rose, as it 'sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child in' ("Impossibility" 59).

Harry's position outside the process which pre-determines his rationale for him, depends on his initial ignorance or emptiness, both as a child and as someone who has hitherto been categorically told that 'there's no such thing as

magic' (Rowling, *Stone* 36). Behavioural economists have 'long criticised the notion of homo economicus,' pointing out that it functions with an 'operational emptiness' (Shen et al. 354). Constructing the rational neoliberal consumer depends not on an organic development of the individual's own rationality, but the hegemonic internalisation of pre-existing market principles. The *homo economicus* starts her/his journey as a tabula rasa, an operationally empty subject, upon whom the external principles and rationale of the market are interpellated. The narrative strategy of downloading information for the naive hero is employed by Rowling to interpellate Harry as a magical consumer who follows market rules. Modern consumer theory argues that such an identity is developed through images of an irrational or impulsive consumer training to rationalise her/his choices. This rationalisation, however, is governed not in terms of commodities she/he has self-critically decided to buy, but which commodities she/he is *told* she/he rationally needs (Ainslie 463-96).¹⁷ The adult voice regulates this construction of Harry's consumer autonomy, tempering his childlike impulsivity with a rational regulation. This regulation is depicted in terms of adult supervision and restriction, as when 'Hagrid almost had to drag Harry away' from a book he is not allowed to buy, and later when he 'wouldn't let Harry buy a solid gold cauldron' (Rowling, *Stone* 62). Harry's objective financial ability to afford a gold cauldron is rendered irrelevant by Hagrid's insistence that the official school list mandates him to buy a pewter cauldron instead (62). Identifying this construction in terms of the *homo economicus*

¹⁷ Consumer theorists have demonstrated that there is a categorical difference between the sociological conceptions of *homo sapiens* and *homo economicus*. While the former acknowledges the quasi-rational, emotion-driven behavioural patterns humans tend to follow, the latter subtly targets the quasi-rational dimension of consumer behaviour to offer an externalised set of principles as the 'true' rationale to emulate (Rachlin and Raineri 93-118; Thaler 39-60).

demonstrates the ideological motivator behind Rowling's narrative strategy, one which ensures that 'the child is secondary and instrumental to the wishes and purposes of adults' (Nikolajeva, *Power* 25).

Making the apprentice consumer secondary to the wishes and purposes of the market rationale is integral to the functioning of neoliberal economy. Superficially, neoliberal popular discourse insists that the *homo-economicus* is 'capable of choosing rationally and responsibly in ways that will bring about...self-chosen ends' (Sugarman 105). These self-chosen ends, however, are contingent upon more fundamental ends which have already been chosen for the individual subject. The necessity for neoliberal governmentality to pre-choose these principles depends upon the economic nature of modern capitalism, which 'cannot survive without constant expansion' (Eagleton 49). For this expansion, it is not merely enough to generate new participants, but also the adherence of those participants to the principles and rules which would ensure the *productive* use of commodities. These are the principles downloaded for Harry in the adult voices of Hagrid and the school shopping list (Rowling, *Stone* 52-53), presenting magical commodities not as artefacts whose mere acquisition offers autonomy, but suggesting that there is an underlying rationale behind the purchase and use of such objects which needs to be followed.

This autonomy and range of choices characters have is made further contingent upon the value of objects, which are pre-fixed for them. As discussed earlier, differences in buying power are often depicted in terms of emotional and social disappointment, as with Ron's inability to access expensive commodities. Adult knowledge and advice once again dictates how the values of commodities are justified in terms of individual brand authority. With regard to the magic

wand, Rowling depicts wandmakers as privy to a ‘complex and mysterious branch of magic,’ which not all wizards have access to (*Hallows* 400). The value of wands, therefore, crystallises around this idea of specialised knowledge which only elite producers are privy to. ‘A useful article,’ Marx argues, ‘has value only because abstract human labour is objectified [*vergegenständlicht*] or materialised in it.’ The magnitude of this value is determined by ‘the quantity of the ‘value-forming substance,’ the labour, contained in this article’ (*Capital* 129).¹⁸ While Marx goes on to develop his argument primarily in terms of working hours, the crafting of a magical object like a wand in *Harry Potter* suggests not only the wandmaker’s work hours, but also her/his access to a form of privileged, professional knowledge, the Marxian ‘value-forming substance.’ As Sugarman assesses, ‘in classical liberalism, people owned themselves as though they were properties and could sell their capacities for labour in the market. By contrast, in neoliberalism, people own themselves as if they are entrepreneurs of a business’ (104). The crystallisation of the wandmaker’s secret knowledge in his product transforms him into the entrepreneur of his own business. As a brand, his name promises quality, and commands market authority in his specialised knowledge that even powerful wizards do not possess themselves (Rowling, *Hallows* 74-75).

This image of the wandmaker as a brand unto himself is evidenced in the naming of the businesses in *Harry Potter*, a narrative choice which can be linked to the neoliberal development of individual identity as a source of market authority. Ollivander and Gregorovitch are depicted as two of the most famous

¹⁸ Later Marxist scholarship has taken this idea of value as sublimated labour further, by factoring in expertise and industrial efficiency in addition to work hours for the determination of value (Mitra 64-133).

wandmakers, whose businesses are named after themselves (*Goblet* 271).¹⁹ The insistence that Ollivander's has been in business since 382 BC (*Stone* 63) suggests that the shop is an artisanal, family business, but Teare argues that 'this fact is used primarily to enhance their market value' (340). At the social level, this enhancement of market value takes place by transforming Ollivander into a person-as-brand in neoliberal terms. Value, in this construction, is guaranteed through an appeal to the consumer on a personal, emotional register, rather than a clinically economic one. As opposed to notions of brand value in early 20th century capitalism, under neoliberalism, 'rather than being targeted as buyers in a purely economic sense, consumers within brand culture are urged to establish a relationship and experience with brands that is personal and intimate' (Banet-Weiser, "Brand" 25). Ollivander is depicted as a kind old man with 'wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the shop,' who speaks to Harry softly and refers affectionately to his memory of Harry's parents (Rowling, *Stone* 63). This image establishes his relationship with his customer on personal, intimate terms, rather than as a corporate institution. Further, the magical nature of the wand ensures Harry's acquisition of it not simply as a mechanical, economic transaction, but in narrative terms of an intimate emotional experience.

Harry took the wand. He felt a sudden warmth in his fingers. He raised the wand above his head, brought it swishing down through the dusty air and a stream of red and gold sparks shot from the end like a firework, throwing

¹⁹ A number of businesses in the books follow similar strategies, using personal names as brands, from Madame Malkin's Robe Shop (Rowling, *Stone* 59) to Florean Fortescue's ice cream parlour (*Azkaban* 42).

dancing spots of light on to the walls. Hagrid whooped and clapped and Mr.Ollivander cried, “Oh, bravo!” (65)

The exact roots of how a wand’s value is fixed is hidden in this construction of the individual wandmaker who engages personally with the consumer and gains personal trust. Under neoliberal practices, ‘a brand is the perception, the series of images, themes, morals, values, feelings, the essence of what will be experienced, a promise. Together these characteristics consolidate to project a version of authenticity’ (Banet-Weiser, “Brand” 26). The promise, and the authenticity of the commodity, are both expressed through the narrative vision of the wandmaker as a wise, well-trusted adult authority whose name commands respect. This strategy, like the rationale behind the purchase of commodities, also downloads for the protagonist a guarantee of value which is passively accepted.²⁰ The seven galleons Harry pays for his wand (Rowling, *Stone* 65) is understandably a significant amount of money, as in the second book Rowling shows the Weasleys, a family of seven, only having a single Galleon in their bank vault (*Chamber* 47). However, this value is justified by Hagrid’s unquestioned assertion to him that Ollivander is the best brand to purchase wands from (*Stone* 63). Fixing and justifying values for consumers in terms of individual experts and brand identities, rather than the functioning of market forces, is a distinctly neoliberal ideological strategy. In this construction, ‘bureaucracies of state and economy share an interest in depoliticising the

²⁰ Magic in Rowling’s books therefore operates through objects similar to modern technology. There is an insistence on the expertise and sophisticated training that has gone behind the production of such commodities, which govern their brand (and thus price) according to a specialised body of expert knowledge difficult for consumers to navigate. Brands crystallise value by obscuring the relations between labour and price, in lieu of an abstract, performative sophistication. This transformation of magical objects into specialised commodities is the reconfiguration O’Har does not address in his argument about magic as opposed to technology in the books (862-864).

perception of their power and ideology by subordinating them to the neutral image of disciplined technology and expertise' (O'Neill 57). Autonomy in buying a wand is therefore made contingent upon a necessary acceptance of and trust for the individual authority of the expert producer.

While market rationale and value thus subtly regulate the playing field within which the characters' autonomy is exercised, the construction of hegemonic identity necessitates the portrayal of this autonomy as voluntary and not stultified by contingency. Campbell argues that choices '*made on his behalf*' are concealed within the superficial portrayal of Harry's 'myriad choices throughout his journey' (*Portals* 178). Rowling succeeds in this concealment by highlighting the images of wizardly children willingly participating in economic exchange, acting out of ostensibly voluntary consumer desire. The 'increasing emotional components of the brand' (Banet-Weiser, "Brand" 27) in the neoliberal economy ensure that economic exchanges are framed within specific cultural practices which individuals actively desire (Zelizer). In the following section, I argue that Rowling depicts broomsticks as branded commodities specifically targeted at child consumers. She achieves this by making it centrally important to magical school culture in her books, which makes the acquisition of superior models intensely desirable for children at Hogwarts. At the same time, she offers narratives of children taking personal responsibility in dealing with the potential troubles of such a powerful desire. While the narratives paint an optimistic picture of adult didacticism being perceived as undesirable, and the youthful exuberance and celebration of the broomstick (and the sport it is used for), this strategy represents a problematic neoliberal ideology. It makes the individual solely responsible for the outcome of her/his actions, while

concealing (and thus absolving) the market structure's complicity in constructing consumer desire in the first place.

2.2. The Broomstick: Market Construction of Desire, and Personal Responsibility

2.2.1 Consumer Culture, Child Consumers, and Desire

In a hegemonic society, interpellated subjects are always depicted as voluntary participants. One of the most effective and discernible strategies to assert this willingness on part of consumers to exercise autonomy is to construct desire as a guiding principle in social life. In Chapter 1, I demonstrated how through a portrayal of the house system as optimistic and rewarding, school culture interpellates students into willing adherents to rules and behaviour. In the context of economic autonomy, the school sports culture similarly transforms child characters into desiring consumers. Drawing from the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Brian Massumi contends that modern capitalism distorts desire as *becoming* into desire for *possessing* (82-84; Deleuze and Guattari). A capitalist mode of economy, Massumi argues, involves a necessary 'straight-jacketing of desire (desire turned against itself).' whereby desire is 'short-circuited by an infinite fed-back loop' (82-84). Examining the link between neoliberal capitalism and the production of consumer desire, Kenya Wolff builds on Massumi's argument in identifying that 'in the middle of this loop is an object of intense desire that creates the illusion that it can be obtained and create fulfillment' (330). Neoliberal capitalism thus sustains market expansion by producing imaginary needs among consumers to purchase commodities obsessively.

This construction of imaginary needs for individual consumers is of particular relevance when the consumer in question is a child. Due to the hierarchical gap in age, authority, and experience between adult marketers and child consumers, Marah Gubar raises the question of coercion and ‘collaboration’ as depicted in literature about precocious children (8). The importance of children in consumer culture has expanded significantly since the late 20th century, with the advent of a children’s market. The production, circulation, and distribution of products targeted specifically at child consumers dominates a significant segment of modern market economy. Joel Bakan, in his book *Childhood Under Siege*, a study of children as consumers under big business, identifies the 1970s as the watershed decade for this phenomenon, following the work of James McNeal, ‘the founder and first guru of kid marketing,’ and his prescription of ‘targeting children separately from parents with content uniquely enticing to them’ (Bakan 34).²¹ Such a strategy depends on a refreshed acknowledgment of the increasing buying power of children in the market, and a subsequent need to construct children as a unique class of desiring consumers in the economy.

Critics differ in their assessment, however, about how passive or helpless child consumers are in this process of being targeted by marketing, and to what extent they themselves are complicit in the desire. I argue that Rowling uses images of children actively seeking and acquiring broomsticks, and putting them

²¹ Although children have been consumers since at least the 17th century, the children’s market as we understand it today only developed in the 1970s. While commodities for children, specifically toys, would earlier be sold as family products, post-1970s kid marketing deliberately targets children as consumers to encourage their development of desire for commodities against the rational interest of their parents. Critics have identified a number of factors behind the success of such marketing; increasing pocket money for children, the growing frequency of nuclear or one-parent families, as well as the unprecedented boom of the advertising and mass media industry (Bakan 20-66; Calvert 205-234; Cook, “Study”).

to good use on the sports field, to absolve the market of much of its responsibility in producing desire for a potentially dangerous commodity. Her strategy is in keeping with the neoliberal vision of the autonomous consumer, which challenges the deterministic view of consumer culture as something that acts upon the blank space of childhood (Buckingham). This vision insists that the capitalist economy does not merely act upon children as passive recipients of cultural stimuli, it requires the active participation of children in constructing their own desire as consumers. This co-opting of children into perceiving their desire as conscious and fulfilling, rather than coerced, is crucial to neoliberal governmentality's reconfiguration of consumer action as the salient medium of individual freedom (Barber; Furnham and Gunter).²² Rowling succeeds in portraying her children as actively desiring consumers by locating sports culture at the heart of school life in books, around which characters actively develop their social relationships.

The child characters in *Harry Potter*, as discussed in Chapter 1, are portrayed as active and willing participants in the magical discipline. In terms of the market as well, they are characterised by a similar participation; they purchase and collect children's commodities, and make use of such commodities in forming social relationships. Harry's first social interaction with Ron evidences this, when the collection and exchange of Chocolate Frog cards is explained to the former.

²² Economic scholarship has analysed a number of ways in which this reconfiguration takes place, from strategies of targeted advertising (Acuff) to the customisation of market commodities to social trends and cultural shifts, particularly among young consumers (Thomas, *Buy*).

“Chocolate Frogs have cards inside them, you know, to collect — famous witches and wizards. I’ve got about five hundred, but I haven’t got Agrippa or Ptolemy.”

Harry unwrapped his Chocolate Frog and picked up the card. It showed a man’s face...

“So this is Dumbledore!” said Harry.

“Don’t tell me you’d never heard of Dumbledore!” said Ron. “Can I have a frog? I might get Agrippa — thanks!” (Rowling, *Stone* 77)

In forming social bonds of exchange around the purchase of magical commodities, the child characters collaborate with the economic structures which provide such commodities. I use ‘collaboration’ in the nuanced sense that Gubar employs it to denote ‘a range of relationships’ between children and adults, rather than ‘an uncomplicated partnership between equals,’ where ‘the idea of reciprocity can itself function as a seductive mirage that curtails the agency of children’ (8). In her analysis, the collaboration of children as consumers with the producers and distributors of the commodities they use implies ‘something more upbeat than out-and-out coercion in which a stronger party oppresses a weaker one,’ a view that Buckingham challenges as well. At the same time, collaboration ‘need not (and rarely does) refer to a perfectly reciprocal bond within equals’ (8). What is necessary in this regard is to investigate to what extent the construction of this desire is depicted as active collaboration in the books, and to what extent Rowling transfers responsibility for risk-taking and decision making to the child consumer rather than the market that constructs desire.

I argue in this section that the broomstick as a commodity of desire reorganises social interaction around the fundamental need for economic activity. The images of potential rewards and social prestige around the sports culture in the books are made contingent upon the possession of good, expensive broomsticks. I address the implications of this narrative depiction in two sections. Firstly, I argue that desire for the broomstick is constructed through market strategies and the cultural practice of depicting Quidditch and moral rivalry about the commodity in the texts. Secondly, I argue that the texts largely conceal this construction, depicting responsibility for engaging with the desire as an entirely individual, personal concern.

2.2.2 The Broomstick as Desirable: The Importance of School Sports Culture

Rowling constructs the broomstick in her books as ‘the most important accoutrement of wizard childhood’ (Teare 341), which ‘are for sport, rather than transportation, as they are too visible for the Ministry of Magic’s comfort’ (Lacoss 77). Throughout the series, children in the texts actively identify and locate the broomstick as a central marker of the sports culture that permeates wizardly school life. Rowling acknowledges the role of brooms as luxury goods when she claims that the modern broomstick was first ‘marketed as a racing broom specifically designed for sporting use’ (Rowling, *Quidditch* 49). This sporting use, in turn, is given central importance in Hogwarts school social culture, drawn from the British school story (Steege 147-149). The value of the broomstick as a luxury commodity is fixed and held in place by the ideological construction of sports culture as important to school life in the first place. The children’s desire for the broomstick, a luxury product, does not derive from any organic ‘natural appetite’ of its consumers (Appadurai, “Commodities” 40).

Rather, they are economically created through an ideological emphasis on sports culture, which children are invited to participate in. Desire for broomsticks is thus sustained through ‘a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality’ of the characters, for whom the broomstick becomes integral in developing their personal identity through sports (38).²³

The importance of sports to magical childhood is depicted in the image of school life at Hogwarts, where excellence in sports receives more overt social approval than academic accomplishments. As David K. Steege notes, ‘The Harry Potter novels follow very closely the school story tradition of making games and sports central to the boarding school experience; some of the most vivid and popular scenes in the series take place on the playing field’ (148). Quidditch, in *Harry Potter*, functions as more than a simple feature of magical childhood; success, appreciation among peers, teamwork, and loyalty to one’s house, are all fundamental concepts which play out around the activity of Quidditch in the books. This in turn communicates the desirability of inculcating such qualities through the narrative depiction of sports in particularly emotional and optimistic terms (Rowling, *Azkaban* 224-230). Victory in Quidditch often frames emotionally charged episodes of great personal triumph and camaraderie, thus offering the narrative locus for the celebration of social relationships. This is evidenced after Gryffindor’s underdog tournament victory in the fifth book:

The song was growing louder, but it was issuing not from a crowd of green-and-silver-clad Slytherins, but from a mass of red and gold moving slowly

²³ The centrality of sports and physical prowess to school life in *Harry Potter* makes it possible to portray the broomstick as a commodity of such great importance. Rowling draws the social significance of sports from the school story tradition, where physical ability is often the site of examination, reward, and social approval from both peers and adult authorities (Winn 64-73).

toward the castle, which was bearing a solitary figure upon its many shoulders...

“HARRY! HERMIONE!” yelled Ron, waving the silver Quidditch Cup in the air and looking quite beside himself. “WE DID IT! WE WON!”

They beamed up at him as he passed; there was a scrum at the door of the castle and Ron’s head got rather badly bumped on the lintel, but nobody seemed to want to put him down. Still singing, the crowd squeezed itself into the entrance hall and out of sight. Harry and Hermione watched them go, beaming, until the last echoing strains of “Weasley Is Our King” died away. (Rowling, *Phoenix* 618-619)

Quidditch thus functions as an important cultural event in socialising children in school, and success in the sport in turn is crucially dependent on access to a fast broomstick, as speed and control in the air determine to a large extent the results of a game. Consequently, the broomstick’s desirability as an object occupies a central role in the culture that children in *Harry Potter* inhabit and participate in. In *Worst Witch*, a similar strategy is used to depict sports and broomsticks in school culture. It is told that ‘on her first day at the academy each pupil was given a broomstick and taught to ride it’ (Murphy 7), and a failed attempt to have the girls fly as a broomstick formation team is depicted with much comic effect (31-33). However, in *Harry Potter*, although children are given broomsticks owned by the school for preliminary flying lessons (Rowling, *Stone* 109), it is suggested that school broomsticks are usually inferior models suitable only for preliminary practice. The models of broomsticks fast and

sophisticated enough are all considerably expensive commodities.²⁴ Rowling thus frames social success in school sports culture as contingent upon the ability to purchase commodities. Broomsticks thus fulfill the definition of luxury commodities, whose ‘principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs’ (Appadurai 38). More than their practical utility as modes of magical transportation, they derive their desirability from the symbolic value attached to them in a culture which celebrates sports as a marker of social success.

In the fictional history of her magical world, Rowling claims that while ‘wizarding families in [medieval] days made their own brooms’ (Rowling, *Quidditch* 2), the symbolic value of brooms increased with modern markets. She consciously portrays broomsticks as contemporary, mass-produced, branded luxury goods. This is evidenced in her claim that ‘the breakthrough occurred in 1967,’ when the Cleansweep Broom Company ensured that brooms ‘were produced in numbers never seen before’ (49), flooding the market with accessories such as ‘Fleetwood’s High-Finish Handle Polish’ and ‘gleaming silver Tail-Twig Clippers’ (Rowling, *Azkaban* 14-15). These commodities are clearly depicted as products of competitive production; ‘the brand of broomstick one rides is a status symbol, and the best model of one year, Harry’s Nimbus 2000, can be made obsolete by next year’s Nimbus 2001, acquired by arch-rival

²⁴ Success at sports, a crucial aspect of school life, is thus tied up with economic power. ‘Although this is never stated,’ Mendlesohn comments, ‘Quidditch is a rich man’s sport... Quidditch players with old brooms can never compete with those in possession of the latest technological marvels’ (“Crowning” 172). As with the dress robes and the wand analysed earlier, this configures social prestige around the question of purchasing power.

Draco Malfoy' (Teare 341). In such a market, consumers are obliged to purchase and update their broomsticks to remain competitive at Quidditch.

While the importance of money in purchasing better and faster broomsticks is indeed addressed occasionally in the books, the economic aspect of buying it is made an accessory to the more abstract, somewhat moral desire to excel at sports. Rowling portrays this by drawing upon the British school story tradition which prioritises excellence at sports as a marker of not only social, but moral superiority, where 'the school playing field is like a battleground where heroic deeds are done' (Bristow 57).²⁵ The acquisition of the broomstick is therefore depicted as governed by an honourable desire to represent one's house on the field and win laurels for them. David Long identifies the 'important place [occupied by Quidditch] in the construction of identity and difference, solidarity and enmity, as well as its social function in the generation of individual and international competitiveness and the legitimization of a world of dramatic inequality' (129). Rowling carefully avoids presenting the desire for the broomstick as solely driven by financial considerations. She achieves this by using foil characters to Harry and his allies; foils who are used to demonstrate overt flaunting of money as unpleasant.

The most common example of this foil comes in the form of the contrasting depictions of Harry and Malfoy. Harry's acquisition of the Nimbus Two Thousand broomstick is presented as a legitimate behavioural model; it is suggested that the school authorities 'bend the first-year rule' for Harry, the

²⁵ The physical exertion and resilience to injuries and exhaustion that sports necessitates not only serve in school stories as an external marker of character-building, but also provide a productive medium to channel masculine energy into a productive "muscular christianity" (Winn 64-73; Harvey, "Victorian" 17-29).

preferential treatment framed as a deserved appreciation of his innate talent and skill (Rowling, *Stone* 113). In contrast, when Harry's foil and rich, spoilt, schoolyard bully Draco Malfoy uses his father's money to bribe his way into the House team, his behaviour is overtly depicted in negative light as underhanded, and further condemned in the portrayal of his bigotry when Hermione protests his action (Rowling, *Chamber* 86-87). Mendlesohn identifies this, and observes that 'when the Malfoys present the Slytherin team with new brooms, this is presented as cheating; when Harry receives a new, high-powered broom, it is framed as simply good fortune that rectifies a perceived injustice' ("Crowning" 172). The ideological motivation behind this construction is based on the neoliberal need to distance the acquisition of the commodity from the visible, economic roots of desire, to a more abstract social sphere. Harry is presented as the model neoliberal, meritocratic candidate, who exemplifies the assumption that if an individual works hard enough to prove she/he worthy, she/he shall be justifiably rewarded (Shildrick 87-112, Littler).²⁶ Thus, his reception of the high-powered broom is justified by the assertion that he has already proven his innate talent at flying in the Remebrall episode (Rowling, *Stone* 110-112). His talent and the *social* admiration he receives is made the primary aspect of this episode, while the *economic* acquisition of the broom is depicted as only a collateral reward.

As his foil, Malfoy follows the opposite course of action; he actively uses his family's buying power to bypass the need to prove his talent, and bribes

²⁶ The parameters by which an individual is judged, however, are influenced by pre-existing economic and social networks of approval. Cultural critics have demonstrated how, despite putting in the same number of work hours or achieving equitable outcomes, individuals are often discriminated against based on social, behavioural, or cultural perception-based bias in a variety of workplaces (Shildrick 87-112). The meritocratic view of neoliberal life does not claim an observably equal starting point.

his way into the team. The issues of which child ‘deserves’ the commodity more, or who has justifiably ‘earned’ the right to be gifted it, offer contrasting moral models of behaviour. In condemning Malfoy for visibly flaunting his wealth to bribe the sports team, Rowling depicts Harry as more moral because he is more concerned with excelling at the sport rather than his own financial power. Rowling subtly conceals that Harry’s desire for and acquisition of the broomstick is equally contingent on the market by employing Malfoy as an overt, caricaturish foil of the spoilt, rich child. Mendlesohn argues that Rowling is concerned with ‘not how money is used, but who has it’ (“Crowning” 172). To build on this argument, Rowling’s depiction of moral action depends not only on who has money, but who chooses to make its use pointedly visible. In other words, money is not the marker of moral character so much as who chooses to flaunt it. This construction is further reinforced in the depiction of Lucius Malfoy, a man equally arrogant as his son, who bullies those financially inferior to him:

He reached into Ginny’s cauldron and extracted, from amid the glossy Lockhart books, a very old, very battered copy of *A Beginner’s Guide to Transfiguration*...

Mr. Malfoy said. “Dear me, what’s the use of being a disgrace to the name of wizard if they don’t even pay you well for it?...and I thought your family could sink no lower.” (Rowling, *Chamber* 51)

The unpleasant depiction of the Malfoys’ obsession with their wealth serves to conceal the fact that Harry, too, has considerable economic power. Much like the strategies of hegemony and coercive state apparatus discussed in Chapter 1 with regards to Umbridge and the classroom, this strategy helps keep

the economic roots of the desire for the broomstick invisible. The insistence that unlike Malfoy, Harry does not focus on the economic aspect of acquiring a broomstick, helps maintain the latter's image of moral superiority. For neoliberal consumerism, it is important to conceal that 'consumers are simply not free... their desires are shaped by market forces, which depends on other scripts' (Jung, "Desire" 21).²⁷ Harry's abstract, honourable desire to perform well at Quidditch and prove his talent is offered as the preferred model of moral behaviour. This model frames him as an active, voluntary participant in school sports, rather than a consumer whose desire and demands are shaped visibly by market forces. Mullen demonstrates that while Quidditch is a 'democratic game, able to be played well by big and small, male and female,' it 'doesn't equate democracy with sameness' ("Schooldays" 133). This construction evidences the ideological underpinnings of *Harry Potter*; neoliberal governmentality insists that the role of democracy is not to ensure an egalitarian sameness, but to preserve a playing field within which active competition (and, consequently, an unavoidable inequality) can proceed with freedom.

This highlighting of individual talent and the freedom to showcase it, allows Rowling to offer an optimistic vision of children learning to handle the broomstick in terms of their own desire to impress their peers at sports. At the same time, this subtly shifts responsibility onto the child consumers, by concealing the role of market forces and cultural structures of the school which

²⁷ This external production of desire is integral to the interpellation of individuals as *homo economicus*. Because the neoliberal rationale of self-interest is actually constructed by forces external to the subject, market desire too needs to be structured by demands and requirements which are divorced from the actual consumer's organic need/desire (Rachlin and Raineri 93-118).

locate the broomstick at the heart of this desire in the first place. In the next section, I address how this image of personal responsibility is constructed.

2.2.3 Desire and Personal Responsibility

The participation of children in school sports culture is part of the collaborative process which shapes the necessary desire for good broomsticks. Children's marketing is 'often deliberately designed to wedge them away from their parents' (Bakan 34), constructing a specialised desire for the category of commodities targeted at them. Bakan's concern, and the role of adult guidance to avoid the potential dangers of commodities, is depicted in the image of children as collaboratively and voluntarily taking responsibility for their actions. This is an important ideological vision to perpetuate for the functioning of neoliberal hegemony. Because Rowling constructs her children as actively exercising their autonomy and desire to excel at broomstick-related sports, she also makes children themselves the site of responsibility. In particular, an episode with the Firebolt in the third book portrays this construction. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, despite the portrayal of adult voices warning child characters of the dangers of desire, the narrative largely sides with the children's exercise of their own desire regardless of the warnings.²⁸ This strategy upholds children's autonomy in exercising their desire, and makes them actively desiring subjects rather than overtly didactic subjects to oppressive adult authority.

Ideologically, this allows Rowling to construct desire hegemonically; while the

²⁸ This clash of priorities plays out over the course of two chapters in Rowling's text (*Azkaban* 170-184), as analysed in this section. A more frequent admonition of broomstick-related activities as too dangerous is articulated by Madam Pomfrey, the school matron, and her perspective is largely ignored by the students who believe she is being overprotective (*Chamber* 130-132; *Azkaban* 135; *Goblet* 312-313). The child characters' eagerness to risk injury for the exhilaration Quidditch offers portrays the voluntary and optimistic model of their participation in the social ritual of flying.

roots of desire lie in adult market practices, the children are interpellated into subjects who internalise that desire and act upon it out of a perceived willingness.

The Firebolt is introduced as the latest, highly desirable broomstick, and Harry's curbing of his overwhelming desire to possess it is portrayed in the text through a process of reluctant rationalising; 'he had a very good broom already' (Rowling, *Azkaban* 44). His peers in school offer similar reactions which represent the broomstick as an object of desire to the point of fetishising it (184-185). The overwhelming power of the desire for the commodity is portrayed throughout the text, and the underlying threat of danger such desire holds is suggested when the Firebolt is confiscated by Professor McGonagall (172). As Harry receives the broomstick at a point in the story where an old enemy may be trying to murder him, the Hogwarts faculty are portrayed as a responsible, adult governing body who wish to ensure for the boy's own safety that the broomstick has not been sabotaged in any way. Thus, this episode makes the broomstick, by virtue of the desire it elicits, a site of conflict between adult rational guidance and the child's spontaneous, largely emotional investment in the object. The emotional value of the Firebolt is, as discussed earlier, inspired by a social desire to excel in sports. The most significant example of this is witnessed in the reaction of the child most invested in the sport, the team captain Oliver Wood.

"Bad news, Harry. I've just been to see Professor McGonagall about the Firebolt. She...told me I'd got my priorities wrong. Seemed to think I cared more about winning the Cup than I do about you staying alive. Just because I told her I didn't care if it threw you off, as long as you caught the snitch first."
(181)

While there is undeniably an element of humour intended here, the very fact that what can be seen as a legitimate anxiety is normalised and presented in humorous terms indicates that Rowling does not intend to present this adult concern as a matter of much serious introspection. The narrative privileges the children's emotional desire in getting the broomstick back over cold, adult didacticism; Harry's hopeful, affective inquisition regarding the status of his broomstick is contrasted by 'Professor McGonagall's severe voice,' with a stern reprimand to 'stop bothering [her]' (181). However, there is no engagement or adult explanation to the children regarding the dangers of their heedless desire itself, and the adult authority merely ensures the safety of children rather than teaching them how to be more wary of potential danger. That the legitimacy of the children's autonomous desire is not challenged by any moral didacticism on the teachers' part perpetuates the contemporary neoliberal principles of personal responsibility. According to these principles, neoliberal 'governing occurs by providing individuals with choices and holding them accountable for the choices they make' (Sugarman 105). While the matronly presence of Professor McGonagall can advise caution and employ school discipline in confiscating the commodity, the adult voice is not expected to provide a didactic lesson for the child in the morals of responsible use of commodities and desire.

Although Rowling employs in Hermione a non-adult voice which may provide an alternative locus of experience, her voice is largely ignored and functions as little more than a narrative device to highlight the ongoing tension between herself and Ron (Rowling, *Azkaban* 187). She is depicted as immune to the desire of the broomstick; as an academically inclined student, she has little investment in the sports culture that reveres and even fetishises the broomstick

as an object of great desire. Her outsider status to this culture is markedly a cause of friction with her peers, with otherwise friendly characters like Ginny admonishing her with a dismissive ‘don’t start acting as though you understand Quidditch...you’ll only embarrass yourself’ (Rowling, *Prince* 496). Hermione voices an opinion which is therefore not governed by the particular construction of desire which Harry or Ron subscribe to. However, because most of the narrative is saturated by the affective appeal of the boys’ desire to win the Quidditch cup, her voice never gains as much focalising power as Harry’s or even Ron’s over the course of the book. ‘A skillful author...’ argues Aidan Chambers, ‘structures his narrative...in a dramatic pattern that leads... to possible meaning(s); and he stage-manages... by bringing into play various techniques’ (Chambers 5). Rowling stage-manages Hermione’s voice by having other characters frequently identify her as bossy and somewhat morally didactic. Meredith Cherland examines how both the discourse and the subjective positioning of Hermione with reference to her peers sets her apart in the books. She examines how Rowling uses a ‘discourse of irrationality’ to position Hermione’s concerns as frivolous and, at times, overtly annoying (275).²⁹ Harry’s and Ron’s voices of emotionally invested determination to get the broomstick back, are offered instead as the behavioural model which finally triumphs.

At the same time, this liberating vision of children voluntarily taking personal responsibility conceals an absolution of adult complicity in their desire.

²⁹ Given this discursive positioning of Hermione, this narrative episode with the broomstick positions the assumed reader as sympathetic to the boys’ cause. While the latters’ outrage, supplemented by the celebratory images of quidditch at Hogwarts, are targeted and invoking an identification, Hermione’s bossy discourse is used to elicit what reader response theory terms a tacit resistance to her position (Lenters 140-146).

As Sugarman contends, the neoliberal discourse on responsibility involves ‘less and less separating those who pursue risk intentionally for profit, from the rest of us for whom it is being woven ideologically into the fabric of everyday life’ (Sugarman 105). Rowling constructs her child characters as collaborators, willingly participating in sports culture and the celebration of the broomstick’s role in Quidditch excellence. However, collaboration on the child’s part cannot be wholly scrutinised in terms of moral responsibility, without considering ‘the *belated* nature of the child’s subjectivity- the fact that young people are born into a world in which stories about who they are (and what they should become) are already in circulation before they can speak for themselves’ (Gubar 6). The child character, who is guided by a desire constructed by both market forces and school cultural traditions, can hardly be considered to ‘pursue risk intentionally for profit’ (Sugarman 106) when her/his emotional reaction overwhelms rational decision-making. Thus, while Malfoy is condemned for bribing his way into the Slytherin team (Rowling, *Chamber* 86-87), it is unclear as to why the adult school authorities fail to regulate or prevent such an instance of the economic market influencing team selections at school. These instances evidence the neoliberal construction of Quidditch as a sport which ‘doesn’t equate democracy with sameness’ (Mullen, “Schooldays” 133). Hogwarts, as the free market par excellence, is not involved in coercively enforcing sameness, but offers a vision of freedom for desiring children as autonomous and individually responsible, who are ultimately allowed to make their own judgments without adult interference.

The Firebolt episode constructs an enticing vision of personal freedom where ‘free will and one’s choice of worldview and peer group’ (Knuth 169)

form the sole moral compass in the pursuit of desire. Indeed, as Knuth contends, Rowling constructs in her protagonist ‘a truly modern hero’ with not only traditional heroic values of literature but also a contemporary ‘autonomy in facing the temptations of power and cruel impulses, including...racism and economic and social elitism’ (170). However, these optimistic portrayals of heroism and personal responsibility subtly depict a specific construction of this ‘autonomy,’ one fixed in place by greater socio-economic structures and pre-existing principles. Rowling’s construction of desire and its fulfilment in her texts exposes a ‘diminishing appreciation that individual’s predicaments are a product of more than simply their individual choice’ that is common in modern neoliberal discourse (Sugarman 105). The books demonstrate the construction of the child as a desiring subject through the depiction of desire as necessary for the formation of social identity, primarily through the importance of sports culture. Even when desire involves potential danger, the complicity of the social construction of desire in perpetuating such problems of dangerous (mis)use is concealed by championing narrative voices of individual responsibility, rather than visible engagements with the economic roots of desire itself.³⁰

Commodities in *Harry Potter* are thus instrumental narrative loci in constructing and communicating notions of autonomy, desire, economic rationale, and responsibility. At the same time, Rowling’s texts use the metaphor of magic to portray the contingency of individual autonomy in literal terms. She

³⁰ This insistence on the sufficiency of personal responsibility, while absolving the market itself for the construction of a desire which is categorically *not* the consumer’s own, is made possible by the identification of *homo economicus* as a rationale. Interpellated successfully, the market-constructed desire masquerades in neoliberal perception as the consumer’s quest for self-interest (Sen, “Fools” 317-344). Given this assumption, any notion of desire is then successfully concealed from its external roots, and transmitted in popular culture as entirely the consumer’s own, autonomous decision.

represents the sentience of the magical commodity itself as independent of the autonomy of users. The commodities in *Harry Potter* are equally involved in the business of exerting their own autonomy, considering that they are magical in nature, which implies their possession of some intrinsic, arcane power, or even some level of sapience. The power they yield to their user, then, does not function simply in terms of purchasing capacity and their direct use as tools. Rather, the magical power inherent in these objects complicates the notions of ownership and use of them. This introduces a new dimension into the possession of magical commodities; that of reciprocal engagement and a dialectical relationship between the consumer and the commodity. This relationship ensures in overt terms that absolute authority cannot be wielded by individuals over these commodities, and the economic structure they constitute. The following section shall explore how Rowling depicts this conflict between individual autonomy and the invisible hand of magic, and the ideological implications of such a vision of consumer power.

2.3. Sentient Magical Commodities: The Invisible Hand of Magic

2.3.1 The Notion of the Invisible Hand in Neoliberal Governmentality

I have demonstrated in the previous sections how the image of the magical commodity frames individual autonomy in the books in terms of consumer behaviour. This exercise of autonomy, however, is complicated by the status of the commodified plot coupons as magical themselves. Economic ownership of the magical commodity alone is not enough to exercise absolute autonomy, since it is not purely an ‘object,’ but also exhibits, in its limited sentience, signs of being a ‘subject.’ Rowling portrays her magical commodities frequently

asserting this subjectivity, thereby transforming the magical interaction between user and commodity into a dialectical engagement. I argue here that this dialectical relationship, depicted as reciprocal rather than a one-way actor-actant relation, communicates a necessarily contingent model of neoliberal autonomy. In this ideological model, all autonomy is exercised in individualistic terms of engaging with commodities, with no scope of addressing the roots of the invisible hand which regulates the commodity itself. Chapter 1 demonstrated how the inevitability and unknowability of the wizard/muggle hierarchy is constructed through an insistence on the mysteriousness and unknowability of magic itself. Here, I argue that a similar image is constructed regarding the contingency of magical action on following certain mysterious rules of magic, disobeying which can diminish one's ability to exercise autonomy in the first place.

This vision of individual autonomy regulated by impersonal socio-economic forces is ideologically informed by the image of the 'invisible hand.' An originally 18th century notion prevalent in classical liberal economics, this model is also perpetuated in neoliberal governmentality (Bishop, *Smith* 165-180). 'Today,' explains Jonathan B. Wight, 'the invisible hand is most commonly said to mean a process by which competitive markets achieve efficiency through a price allocation mechanism' ("Hand" 352). This rationale is a necessary feature of neoliberal ideology. Ideologues adherent to this notion criticise government regulation of market activity, suggesting that an 'invisible' market force already operates on its own to maintain an equilibrium. The insistence here is that no individual autonomy can escape this equilibrium, as the invisible hand will always restore balance. Rowling's metaphor of magic as

regulative of individual action helps literalise not only this notion of autonomy as always regulated by the underlying force, but also insists that as magical, this force can never be fully comprehended. Further, in framing autonomy primarily in terms of economic freedom, Rowling expands the metaphor of the invisible hand to moral and social life in her books. This expansion is particularly relevant in the later books of her series, at a time when fantasy texts ‘speak to contemporary concerns about men and war... post 9/11 and in the aftermath of another war in Iraq’ (Hancock 56).³¹ By depicting magic as an impersonal, semi-theological force that intervenes and redresses moral imbalance in the books, Rowling offers a consolatory model of fantasy (Jackson, *Fantasy* 90), where the invisible hand of magic ultimately heals and restores balance. Ideologically, this perpetuates the idea of the neoliberal status quo, which individual actors can work within but never alter or fully understand.

This status quo, which regulates and maintains the balance of the magical world, reinforces the notion of autonomy in the books as *agency* and not *absolute freedom*. The difference between these two concepts is important to modern economics; the latter is unregulated and therefore can potentially be disruptive of the market in its tendency to become solitarist and counterproductive. The former, however, is guided not simply by the consumer’s whims, but also an underlying framework which dictates how the commodity is *meant to be* used productively. The ‘agency aspect’ of a person,’

³¹ The affective impact of 9/11 on popular culture in the UK took the form of a renewed perception of the enemy as a totalising force, whose aim was not so much conquest as obliteration and complete replacement. In such a scenario, the only imagined ‘outcome possible is the civilisational clash of East and West...of bare life and mere life caught in the grip of the coming state-of-war community’ (Duvall and Marzec 393). It is in this bleak vision of the threat of obliteration that Rowling positions her consolatory fantasy, with the final overthrow of Voldemort and the ‘return’ to normalcy.

Sen posits, ‘...examines achievements and opportunities...possibly going well beyond the pursuit of one’s own well-being’ (Sen, *Ethics* 59). In configuring autonomy as agency, Rowling depicts a dialectical relationship between the consumer’s desire and the socio-economic rationale of the status quo. The commodity, as the functional unit of socio-economic life, represents the latter rationale, and the use of magic as a metaphor represents this dialectical relationship as a *literal* two-way engagement between the wizard’s agency and the wand’s sentience. Thus, while self-interest and individual action are portrayed as the model of neoliberal autonomy, the dialectical relationship prevents this individualism from devolving into unproductive solipsism by constantly reminding the magic user to follow the principles of magic itself. Autonomy can only be exercised in the books within the prescribed guidelines of the magical status quo- without the latter, the user would have no magical ability to begin with.

I shall address this narrative strategy in three sections. Firstly, I shall analyse the sentience of the magic wand in *Harry Potter*, and demonstrate that the narrative instances where the wand resists its user’s power serve to depict a dialectical relationship between consumer and commodity. Ideologically, this constructs a vision of autonomy governed by commodity fetishism, where individual action is contingent upon the relationship between commodities themselves. Secondly, the invisible hand which causes objects to escape their users’ control serves a juridical purpose in the books, passing judgment on violations of moral principles of magic. Morality is determined through the use of good magic as ‘communal’ and restorative of the societal balance, and evil magic as ‘solitary and divisive’ (Bramwell 144). Janet Brennan Croft observes a

similar construction of good/evil in Tolkien's fantasy, commenting that 'if there is any sort of war that a pacifist might be able to accept, it should be the war that liberates a peaceful people from brutal oppression' (*War* 130). In the post 9/11 world, Rowling uses the character of Voldemort to justify Harry's martial use of 'good' magic against the dark lord's evil oppression, and in the ongoing, mysterious relationship between their twin wands, offers magic as a consolatory image of the all-preserving status quo. This status quo restores the fragmented world plagued by terror and uncertainty, acting through its chosen conduit, Harry.

Having demonstrated how the invisible hand is depicted as juridical, intrusive, yet unknowable, I argue that the transformation of the wand from object into an actor or "thing" denies the possibility to ever define the nature of magic itself. Because objects are defined in terms of their use-value or how they function for users, a resistance to being used necessarily marks them as mysterious (Brown). This unknowability of how magic exactly works is explained away in terms of 'realms of magic hitherto unknown and untested' (Rowling, *Hallows* 569) in the books, drawing upon the depiction of magic in fantasy as a force, which 'when present, can do almost everything, but obeys certain rules according to its nature' (Clute and Grant 615-616). In terms of neoliberal ideology, this depiction marks magic as nearly omnipotent and regulative of all magical autonomy, yet functioning through the adherence to certain rules.³² By portraying the status quo as a deliberately mysterious, 'huge, tangled complex of ideas concerning magic and magical practices' (616),

³² Rowling maintains the invisibility of the governing magical force by making her status quo itself the 'huge, tangled complex of ideas concerning magic and magical practices' (Clute and Grant 616).

Rowling ensures that the hand of magic which enforces the adherence of its subjects to its own rules remains invisible, and therefore fixed. Within such a system, the exercise of all moral and societal autonomy is restricted to an individualistic mode of engaging with magical principles; since the underlying force which constructs collective magical life is invisible, the possibility of collective introspection or action is denied to the characters.

2.3.2 The Wand as Sentient: Object as Actor and Dialectical Relationship

Rowling insists throughout the series that the magic wand, despite being bought and sold as a commodity, has ‘feelings’ of its own (Rowling, *Hallows* 399). Harry does not simply pick a wand according to his own economic judgment, but has to ‘try’ a number of wands. After a few failed attempts, he finds one on touching which ‘he [feels] a sudden warmth in his fingers,’ as the wand ‘chooses’ him (Stone 65). The wand shop, site of this transaction, is itself depicted as a magical space, where ‘the very dust and silence in here seemed to tingle with some secret magic’ (63). This ‘secret magic’ suggests the wand’s sentience and ability to act upon its user, transforming the commodity from mere object into an actor in the network of autonomy. ‘The main reason why objects had no chance to play any role before,’ Bruno Latour argues, was due to ‘the very definition of actors and agencies’ (*Reassembling* 71). The magical sentience of the wand grants it agency, and changes its relationship with its user from ‘material, causal’ to ‘reflexive, symbolic’ (71). Analysed in these terms, the relationship between the wand and the wizard in *Harry Potter* can be understood as one which resists a one-way use subject entirely to the wizard’s autonomous will. The wand’s agency complicates the power relation between consumer and commodity, forcing the former to acknowledge the reflexivity of

using a magical object. Using the metaphor of magic, Rowling literalises the wand's transformation from 'asleep like the servants of some enchanted castle' to 'freed from the spell... shaking the other human actors' (73). The relations of power between actor and actant in this depiction make individual autonomy not absolute, but contingent upon the sentient agency of magic itself.

This contingency is often depicted in the refusal of wands to act exactly how their users want them to. This theme drives the narrative of *The Deathly Hallows*, where Voldemort's great personal quest is his search for the legendary Elder Wand; a mythical wand, reportedly crafted by Death himself, which made its wielder invincible in battle (Rowling, *Hallows* 334-335). The primary motive behind this central quest is the refusal of his wand to act as an inanimate and compliant tool. Thus, Voldemort's inability to murder Harry is not expressed in abstract moral terms, but a result of his wand actively refusing to function as a mere object. His autonomy over the commodity he owns is challenged by the 'irruption into the normal course of action of strange, exotic, archaic, or mysterious implements' (Latour, *Reassembling* 80). Ownership, therefore, is an insufficient guarantor of mastery over magic. Voldemort, not understanding how magic functions to resist him, finds his consumer autonomy thwarted by the magical complexity of his own instrument.³³ Further, the inability of even experts to fully comprehend the nature of magic is depicted in Voldemort's torture of Ollivander for this valuable information:

³³ The wand thus functions as a technological device, and mirrors real-life loss of mastery over complex technological products (Norman, *Psychology*). What sets the wand apart is that it does not simply resist the efforts of its user like the errant technological devices analysed by Norman, but resists them according to a mysterious yet juridical sentence. The metaphor of magic thus literalises the dialectical conflict between user and commodity.

“You lied to Lord Voldemort, Ollivander!”

“I did not ... I swear I did not ...”

“You sought to help Potter, to help him escape me!”

“I swear I did not ... I believed a different wand would work ...”

“Explain, then, what happened. Lucius’s wand is destroyed!”

“I cannot understand.” (Rowling, *Hallows* 75)

The wands thus acts independently, according to their own magical principles which are never fully revealed. The first example of the wand thwarting autonomy is portrayed in *The Goblet of Fire*. In this episode, a newly resurrected Voldemort duels Harry, only to have their wands suddenly connect to each other in a beam of light and start acting in a bizarre, unpredictable manner. It is later revealed that this effect is due to Harry’s wand being Voldemort’s wand’s ‘twin’; their wands share the same magical core (feathers from the tail of the same phoenix), and are therefore bound to subvert their wielder’s expectations and act unpredictably if forced to fight each other (Rowling, *Goblet* 575-580). Using this metaphor, Rowling portrays how ‘Harry becomes the magical agent of his own transformation’ (Campbell, *Portals* 167); rather than actively exerting his magical will, his identity as a magic user is transformed *through* him by his wand’s independent actions. There is thus not one, but two sets of actor relationships being portrayed here; Voldemort’s murderous intentions towards Harry, and the fraternal relationship between the twin wands themselves. At the level of the story, this foreshadows the climactic revelation of a deeper connection between the two wizards’ souls (*Hallows* 550-551). Ideologically, however, this construction also suggests a vision of

commodities as independent actors, which have escaped the mere economic roots of their ownership, and act upon each other as actors unto themselves. Voldemort's hostility towards Harry, a 'social relation between men themselves,' is thus influenced and subverted by the link between the magic wands, 'the fantastic form of a relation between things' (Marx, *Capital* 165). Marx's use of the adjective 'fantastic' is important, as it is the metaphor of fantasy and magic in the texts which allows for a literal representation of this dialectical relationship.³⁴

This dialectical relationship expresses itself in terms of a power struggle; since Voldemort and his wand in this episode exert their will as actors in different ways, their relationship becomes a struggle to impose one's identity and autonomy on the other. In Marxian terms, Rowling's use of magic as a metaphor allows for the depiction of magical commodities *literally* as 'products of men's hands...[which] appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own' (*Capital* 165). Rowling insists in the books on the need for magic users to exercise their autonomy cautiously, and treat magical objects in terms of a sentient, dialectical reciprocity. In the narrative, adult voices warn child characters to 'never trust anything that can think for itself if you can't see where it keeps its brain' (Rowling, *Azkaban* 145). This warning insists on the impossibility of gaining mastery over magic as a whole, and suggests that the power relation between the wizard and his wand is an ever-proliferating dialectical process of negotiations and engagement. In neoliberal terms,

³⁴ While Marx uses this allegory to analyse the dissociation of use-value and labour from the vision of the commodity itself (*Capital* 155-172), this imagery is more relevant to contemporary neoliberalism, where the commodity is not only dissociated from its use-value, but actively bestowed value by an external, false rationale of *homo economicus*. The wand escaping the wizard's control in literal terms is an evidence of the efficiency of fantasy as a medium which portrays this contemporary governmentality.

autonomy is configured in terms of an individual effort to keep learning and following the principles of using commodities, a process which does not end in absolute mastery but shall always remain in dialectical engagement.

Hegel's discussion of the lord and bondsman relationship, on which Marx bases his understanding of dialectics, can illuminate the nature of this dialectic. If the wizard, as the 'lord', is to assert his magical identity, this assertion is realised through the presence of his wand, the primary tool of wielding magical power. However, this relationship is complicated by the wand's dual identity, simultaneously a sentient magical actor, and a 'thing' that asserts its own magical autonomy:

The lord uses [the bondsman] as an instrument to master the thing for his own (the lord's) purposes, and not for the bondsman's, and the bondsman acquiesces in the situation, and becomes in fact part and parcel of the total objective situation. This means, however, that the lord cannot get the reciprocal recognition that his self-consciousness demands from a consciousness so degraded and distorted. What the lord sees in the bondsman, or what the bondsman sees in the lord, is not what either sees in himself... The lord therefore paradoxically depends for his lordship on the bondsman's self-consciousness, and entirely fails on the fully realised independence of status which his self-consciousness demands (Hegel 522).

Rowling's use of the metaphor of magic makes visible this paradoxical relationship. On one hand, the wizard depends on the sentience (and therefore, the magical ability) of the wand to assert his identity as a magic user. At the same time, this very sentience denies him a fully realised independence of his status, because a sentient actor shall always resist any attempt to wield absolute

mastery over it. Rowling depicts this relationship between the wand and the wizard as a never-ending process of reciprocal growth, described as ‘an initial attraction, and then a mutual quest for experience, the wand learning from the wizard, the wizard from the wand’ (Rowling, *Hallows* 402). Magic, as discussed in Chapter 1, is structured as a privileged knowledge-system, and it is this depiction of the wand and its use as a dialectical effort, which reaffirm the disciplinary nature of magical knowledge. The discipline can be endlessly engaged with, but will never offer the subject a ‘fully realised independence of status’ from its circumscription (Hegel 522). Thus, while Jim Stone questions whether the ‘boy-wizard’s actuality give[s] him an edge over his merely possible competitors’ (“Imprecision” 642), the actuality of Harry’s magical ability, and the subsequent edge it gives him over muggles, is firmly regulated by a magical sentience which demands his obedience and makes his autonomy contingent. Autonomy is thus depicted as an endless process of dialectic negotiation, always exercised within the bounds of the status quo of magic.

Having demonstrated this transformation of the wand from object to actor, it is now important to analyse under *what* conditions the wand chooses to assert its sentience and intervene in wizardly autonomy. I argue in the next section that, working through the wand, the invisible hand of magic serves a semi-theological, juridical function which works primarily to redress perceived wrongs and restore the balance of the status quo of magic. Rowling uses this image to provide a consolatory narrative where Voldemort as representative of authoritarian evil is ultimately defeated through the intervention of magic itself.

2.3.3 The Juridical Aspect of Magic: Evil, Judgment, and Restorative Justice

The role of the invisible hand which intervenes in human autonomous action is at least in part juridical, as it passes judgment on the violation of certain principles. At the narrative level, these principles are often portrayed in moral terms. The central quest in *Harry Potter* is concerned with the conflict between good and evil, and Voldemort is overtly depicted as the intruding figure of evil in the series. Zipes contends that the ‘vicious sadism’ of Voldemort and his Death Eaters, who ‘have evil written all over their faces,’ makes it ‘easy to empathise with Harry’ (*Sticks and Stones* 180). In the episode from the fourth book discussed earlier, the overtly evil Voldemort’s attempts to attack his ‘twin’ contradicts a moral order which has already demarcated him as clearly evil (Rowling, *Goblet* 575-581). Thus, the invisible hand justifiably intervenes and redresses a perceived violation. Rowling suggests in this depiction that there is a perceived order which magic functions to maintain, and any autonomous action which upsets this order shall invite intervention. Individual autonomy therefore is contingent not only upon the existence of the underlying magical status quo, but also upon an unspecified contract to not disturb its balance.

The importance of restoring balance and order to a world fragmented by the invasion of evil gained acute importance after the terror attacks of 9/11.³⁵ The three final *Harry Potter* books were published after the attacks, and the figures of Voldemort and his followers from *Order of the Phoenix* onwards are

³⁵ The UK’s foreign policy reaction followed by the attacks closely followed the US, and portrayed the seriousness of the threat to English citizens (Ahmad 26-44). Affectively, the image of the Islamic fundamentalist as a totaliser replaced other, historical images of public enemies in popular culture, a social discourse which continues to be exacerbated by the radicalisation of multiple British citizens to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, as well as the cultural and economic fallout of Brexit (Hall and Ross 847-879).

characterised in increasingly contemporary terms regarding the figure of the terrorist; fanatical, driven to sadistic violence, obsessed with ethnic purity, and intolerant of all other forms of life. Rowling follows the practice in fantasy literature of featuring a 'Dark Lord...frequently rooted in whatever political or religious leaders happen to be worrying readers at the time' (Clute and Grant 250). Voldemort's use of violence to subdue his enemies, combined with his promises of a pure, new world, characterise him as the figure of the populist authoritarian of the post 9/11 popular imagination. This is demonstrated in his victory speech when he believes he has killed Harry.

"The battle is won. You have lost half of your fighters. My Death Eaters outnumber you and the Boy Who Lived is finished. There must be no more war. Anyone who continues to resist, man, woman or child, will be slaughtered, as will every member of their family. Come out of the castle, now, kneel before me, and you shall be spared. Your parents and children, your brothers and sisters will live, and be forgiven, and you will join me in the new world we shall build together" (Rowling, *Hallows* 583-584).

The primary threat Voldemort represents here is that of a simmering violence which threatens to fragment the balance of the world at an uncertain moment. Alaa Alghamdi identifies this fear of violence as resonant with the UK's reaction to the 9/11 attacks; 'violence and terror are present in the history and the present reality of people in Britain. It is a violence that always lurks in the present as a memory of the past and a fear for the future' (64). Rowling employs the strategies of intrusion fantasy to depict Voldemort as the agent of evil lurking unseen. The threat of Voldemort as an invading force who threatens the established order of things configures the fear of his evil fundamentally as a

fear of chaos. Stableford comments on how, in intrusion fantasy, ‘the moment the intrusive element appears, the possibility emerges that the simulacrum might be permanently transformed into something else’ (lv). Although the magical world of *Harry Potter* is not entirely a ‘simulacrum of the primary world’ to begin with, in the face of Voldemort’s threat to transform magical society into a grotesque, totalitarian regime, it comes to stand for all that is familiar and worth protecting against anarchic chaos (lv; Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 114-181). This fear of chaos is compounded in the final book by the uncertainty of Voldemort’s plans. To depict this uncertainty, Rowling employs another narrative strategy common to intrusion fantasy: withholding information ‘that serves to wind the spring tight’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 126) to increase the tension and intensity of Voldemort’s evil. This is evident in Lupin’s explanation of the Dark Lord’s strategy; while everybody can guess what Voldemort’s intentions are, it is his deliberate obsession with secrecy which escalates the fear and fragments the wizarding society into families who can no longer trust each other.

Naturally many people have deduced what has happened: there has been such a dramatic change in Ministry policy in the last few days, and many are whispering that Voldemort must be behind it. However, that is the point: they whisper. They daren’t confide in each other, not knowing whom to trust; they are scared to speak out, in case their suspicions are true and their families are targeted. Yes, Voldemort is playing a very clever game. Declaring himself might have provoked open rebellion: remaining masked has created confusion, uncertainty and fear (Rowling, *Hallows* 171-172).

The threat, therefore, presents itself as a fragmentation, dividing people into opposing, distrustful communities through strategically perpetuated

uncertainty. This fragmentation is paralleled in Voldemort's splitting of his own mortal soul to achieve immortality; the Dark Lord's ritual of desecration or a blasphemous act of deconsecration to gain more power (Clute and Grant 813).³⁶ The quest to defeat such a vision of evil is targeted at the 'resolution of the horrifying and inexplicable event,' and a restoration of the fragmented world to its pre-violence state (Alghamdi 61). Rowling uses the strategies of intrusion fantasy to structure the magical life threatened by Voldemort as one which 'not only reflects but supports the prescriptive definition of social order; it relies upon the common sense of that order' (Stableford lv). As analysed in Chapter 1, this common sense is largely constructed through the depiction of the invisible hand of magic as fundamentally mysterious. As a result, 'the solution to the problem posed by a bringer of chaos [such as Voldemort] is self-evident; order must be restored' (lv). Through the image of the sentient wand intervening to save Harry's life, however, Rowling portrays this restoration of order not as an exercise of Harry's magical skill or autonomy, but as a gift from above by the mysterious force of magic itself. A depiction of this is offered in the final book, when a completely helpless Harry has his life saved from Voldemort by the seemingly miraculous intervention of magic:

It was over: he could not see or hear where Voldemort was; he glimpsed another Death Eater swooping out of the way and heard "*Avada-*"

As the pain from Harry's scar forced his eyes shut, his wand acted of its own accord. He felt it drag his hand round like some great magnet, saw a spurt of

³⁶ Voldemort is marked by his hatred for historical traditions of magical life, and desecrations of the same. His deliberate turning of exalted artefacts owned by great wizards into his horcruxes is evidence of this (Rowling, *Prince* 473-474), as is his slaughter of the innocent unicorn for his own immortality (*Stone* 188-189), and the ultimate desecration of placing a part of his own soul into Harry as an infant (*Hallows* 550-551).

golden fire through his half-closed eyelids, heard a *crack* and a scream of fury... (*Hallows* 56-57).

The narrative language used here juxtaposes Harry's helplessness with the powerful independence of his wand, and shows the invisible hand in action. At the same time, the exact principles according to which Harry's wand chose to act in such a manner are only vaguely explained by Dumbledore who claims that Harry's 'wand imbibed some of the power and qualities of Voldemort's wand...and it regurgitated some of his own magic against him' (570). This episode is in keeping with Zipes' assessment of the contemporary construction of children as 'very active participants, but participants in processes and games that are rarely of their own making' (*Sticks and Stones* xiii). Harry as hero is thus the chosen agent, but not the author of his magical autonomy: authority is firmly placed in the invisible hand of magic itself. Although the magical world depicted in the texts is a secular one, the theological overtones of this intervention of the invisible hand *from above* to resist the threat of evil cannot be ignored. Zipes contends that in the texts, 'goodness is doing unto others what you would like done to you, and Harry and his friends are gentle Christian souls' (182). In the secular world of the texts, the impersonal presence of magic replaces the authority of any discernible godhead. The unknowability of this source of power, and the principles it governs by, makes it a far more efficient hegemonic organiser of power than a visibly authoritative one.

This depiction of Harry not as an independent actor, but an instrument of the great magical force, is reinforced through the destinarianism of his quest. Harry, though initially guided in his quest(s) to thwart Voldemort by a sense of personal justice and revenge, eventually discovers that he is the 'Chosen One.'

His role as an agent of ‘good’ in the fight against evil had not only been fixed in place by a prophecy, but apparently well-meaning guardians like Dumbledore had specifically raised him, without his knowledge, for the purpose for a final act of martyrdom (Rowling, *Hallows* 551):

“Part of Lord Voldemort lives inside Harry, and it is that which gives him the power of speech with snakes, and a connection with Lord Voldemort’s mind that he has never understood. And while that fragment of soul, unmissed by Voldemort, remains attached to, and protected by Harry, Lord Voldemort cannot die...”

“So the boy...the boy must die?” asked Snape, quite calmly.

“And Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential” (551).

At the narrative level, Harry’s act of sacrifice is framed by the language of selfless, brave, voluntary martyrdom, and the implications of the event are largely avoided in the image of his grand resurrection and triumph. Nikolaus Wandinger compares Harry’s self-sacrifice to that of Christ, celebrating this episode as a marker of Harry’s moral superiority, because ‘it is love and care for the life of others that motivates Harry to go along the path to his death... he is prepared to sacrifice himself in order to avoid more people being sacrificed for him’ (39). This narrative framing, however, with two adult voices planning and regulating the protagonist’s ultimate fate, is characteristic of the ultimate contingency of individual choice upon underlying principles regulated by higher authorities. Harry’s story, therefore, has been fixed for him by adult voices (Rose, “Impossibility” 58-59). Throughout the series, magic acts according to its own principles in redressing balance and offering protection. Harry’s entire

heroic quest is dominated by the effects of his mother's sacrifice to save his life, which offers him a mysterious protection from Voldemort (Rowling, *Stone* 216). This centrality of martyrdom to magical triumph is reiterated in Harry's Christ-like sacrifice and resurrection in the final book, which allows him to defeat Voldemort (*Hallows* 564-596).³⁷ The importance of adhering to the norms of the magical status quo, rather than absolute individual autonomy, reinforces the contingency of all action upon the juridical invisible hand. As Saradindu Bhattacharya argues, this depiction demonstrates the omnipresent hand of magic which will never allow absolute autonomy to surpass the boundaries set by the status quo.

The ultimate resolution of the conflict between Voldemort and Harry is justified not in terms of magical skill but of moral superiority. Voldemort's defeat leaves unresolved the paradox at the heart of the moral scheme of the world of the books: the infinite potential for achieving fame and power through magic is delimited by moral norms that ensure that no individual surpasses a communally regulated degree of excellence. ("Demons")

This communal regulation and governance of individual autonomy by a force which lies beyond the understanding of those it governs can be described in terms of apophatic theology. This school of thought posits 'the notion of the divine as an inaccessible object of human thought and reasoning' (Ramelli 188). While this divine entity is considered regulative and juridical towards its creation, which it seeks to preserve, it is contended that *because* human thought

³⁷ Voldemort's Satan-like fall from grace, and Harry's self-sacrifice, contribute to the Christian overtone of this final resurrection (Hill, "Right" 413-423). Keeping the Judeo-Christian values of martyrdom intact, Rowling distances herself from overt dogmatism by portraying magic as a secular substitute for a sentient omnipresence which regulates everything.

is itself created by the divine, it cannot be used to understand its own creator.³⁸

Rowling's portrayal of magic as an intervening force which passes judgment without offering insight into the method of judging resonates with this construction. Peter Pettigrew's death is an example of this mode of action. When Pettigrew attempts to murder Harry, who had saved his life in a previous event, an unknown magical principle forces Pettigrew to kill himself. This is again portrayed in terms of the transformation of a magical object into an actor; 'the silver tool that Voldemort had given his most cowardly servant had turned upon its disarmed and useless owner...he was being strangled before their eyes' (Rowling, *Hallows* 381). Dumbledore's authoritative voice explains this phenomenon as a rule of magic, that when 'one wizard saves another wizard's life, it creates a certain bond between them' (*Azkaban* 311). Exactly what this bond entails, or how the rules and morals of this debt function, is concealed through the headmaster's vague assertion that 'this is magic at its deepest, its most impenetrable' (311). This metaphor of magic supplements the image of individual autonomy with a supernatural idea of the invisible hand.

Commenting on the contingency of autonomy in modern society, Terry Eagleton remarks that 'actions we freely perform often end up confronting us as alien powers' (53). The image of magic as juridical enforces this moral message in literal terms; violating the laws of magic results in retributive action. The role of magic itself is depicted as restorative and consolatory; it heals a fragmented world and gets rid of intrusive evil. In an interview with John Newsinger, China Mieville contends that fantasy literature 'in which 'consolation' is a matter of

³⁸ This mode of theology defines the source of divine power in terms of a negation; the fundamental and only accurate definition of the divine authority is that it cannot be defined (Louth 502-514). Rowling's frequent references to magic as fundamentally mysterious closely follow this definition.

policy’ tends to be conservative (Mieville, “Fantasy”). Magic as a semi-divine authority in *Harry Potter* offers this conservative vision of justice; without offering the possibility of transforming the world, it merely returns the status quo to its original balance. Voldemort’s great evil is presented in individualistic terms of a narcissistic usurper, who ‘has the unique power or ability to exert power over others’ (Alghamdi 72). His evil is therefore seen in terms of abuse or violation of the stable, magical status quo. The hierarchical structures that form the status quo itself, however, are never made visible. I argue in the following section that Rowling succeeds in establishing this invisibility through the image of the magical commodity becoming a ‘thing,’ thereby always eluding complete definition.

2.3.4 The Thingness of the Object, and the Invisible Status Quo

I have demonstrated how the juridical and interventionary power of magic is depicted through the image of an object becoming an actor, and escaping the control of autonomous wizards. The image of an invisible hand which functions to keep the magical world working properly, restoring order in consolatory terms, is informed by the neoliberal ideology. As with classical liberalism, the proliferation of a neoliberal economy is dependent upon the popular vision that ‘pursuit of one’s own self-interest is morally justified...because the invisible hand of the market place will ensure that this will result in the general good of society’ (Bishop 165).³⁹ In depicting the invisible hand working through magical commodities, Rowling ensures it remains invisible, as this suggests that

³⁹ Sen demonstrates that this economic pursuit is governed by a rationale which reconfigures moral action itself as the fulfillment of self-interest. As the market is assumed to thrive from the collective pursuit of individuals, it claims competition as the moral model of action in the long term (*Ethics* 22-28).

the true function or meaning of magic and magical objects shall never be fully intelligible to the user.

This unintelligibility can be analysed using the methodological tools provided by anthropological scholarship, which seeks to redefine objects in terms of their function and relations to users, rather than their material presence.⁴⁰ Bill Brown suggests that we only interpret things around us as objects ‘because there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity’ (4). As subjects, modern individuals approach and use the various objects in certain ways, and the identity of such items as ‘objects’ is contingent on these specific functions they serve, the specific positions they hold with regard to how we use them. However, there is more to the identity of items than is defined by their function as useful ‘objects’, and Brown describes this identity-outside-definition-as-object as ‘thingness.’ ‘We begin to confront the thingness of objects,’ he comments, ‘when they stop working for us...when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily’ (“Thing” 4). Latour’s assessment is similar, when he argues that ‘even the most routine, traditional, and silent implements stop being taken for granted when they are approached by users rendered ignorant and clumsy’ (*Reassembling* 80). Applying this analysis to the functioning of the magic wand, the magical commodity’s resistance and dialectical relationship

⁴⁰ Bruno Latour describes such objects as quasi-objects, which often escape individual actors by behaving as a dual actant/actor article (*Reassembling* 77-86). The relationships between actors and objects have been analysed in terms of anthropological relations between objects themselves under conditions of circulation (Appadurai, “Things” 3-63), and in terms of the innate ‘magic’ of objects by which they escape human attempt to categorise them based on their use, rather than innate qualities (Brown, “Thing” 1-22).

with its user also renders it impossible to define it entirely in terms of its use by the wizard. While the wand is defined as an object in terms of its function as a magical tool, when it resists that function and asserts its own sentience, it eludes that definition and becomes a thing beyond the user's control and understanding.

Fundamentally, the 'thing' is defined as a material entity which eludes definition. Brown acknowledges that the 'thing' by definition is amorphous and indeterminate, and posits that it is 'the most compelling name for that enigma that can only be encircled and which the object (by its presence) necessarily negates' ("Thing" 5). The identity of the object as 'thing' only asserts itself when the object slips out of our control, when it refuses to be used in the way we have defined its very functionality.⁴¹ As Brown sums up, the 'thing' is 'what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialisation as objects, or their mere utilisation as objects- their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols and totems' (5). This 'magic by which objects' become more than they are is present literally in the metaphor of the magic wand. Through the narrative depictions of magical objects resisting control, Rowling's wizards are constantly forced to acknowledge the mysterious presence of 'what is excessive in objects' as something beyond their understanding or definition. Appadurai discusses the 'view that things have *no meanings* apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with' (Appadurai, "Commodities" 5). Following this anthropological view, the wand's refusal to be used in the way its

⁴¹ The wand resisting the wizard is a powerful symbolic example of this. It is exalted in the books as the primary marker of magical status, the confiscation of which is an act of ultimate disenfranchisement (Rowling, *Hallows* 214-215). However, in refusing to obey its user, and exerting its identity as a thing, it escapes and inverts that symbolic identity by becoming the chief obstacle to the use of magic power instead (*Goblet* 575).

human user intends not only results in its escaping human control, but also human meaning-making.

The power relation between the user and the commodity is therefore depicted as an effort to make the commodity behave in the way intended. At the same time, there is an absence of the possibility to fully understand or define the underlying principles according to which commodities resist this effort, whose meanings will always elude the individual user. Since the semi-divine, invisible hand of magic which structures the hierarchical status quo cannot be changed or understood, the only mode of action offered is one of individualism. This restrictive and problematic mode often expresses itself in terms of a denial of consent, exerting one's self-interest as a dialectical one necessarily pitted against another's. I argue in the following section that Rowling's normalisation of certain market commodities, which are actively targeted towards the violation of consent, demonstrates the neoliberal emphasis on self-interest. The strategies used to normalise these objects include comic language, foil characters/events, desexualisation of romance, and inversion of gender roles with regard to real-life statistics of consent violation. Rowling's trivialisation of issues of consent, I argue, is very much structured by the neoliberal ideology of individualistic self-interest.

2.4. The Love Potion and the Normalisation of Consent Violation

2.4.1 Magic, Manipulation, and Competitive Self-Interest

As demonstrated in the previous section, the dialectical relationship to impose one's identity onto another's governs the mode of magical autonomy in the books. Such autonomy is made contingent upon an underlying economic

rationale of individual self-interest, whose principles must be followed. It follows, then, that this model of ‘individualistic ethics based on self-interest,’ within a community where each individual *homo economicus* is guided by their respective self-interest, will necessarily ‘atomise people as individuals who must compete with each other to succeed’ (Littler 2). I analyse in this section Rowling’s representation of the love potion, a commodity whose fundamental function is to manipulate consent. The use of the love potion in the books structures autonomy as not merely guided by self-interest, but also an active pursuit of self-interest in conflict with another’s autonomy. The depiction of the potion as a harmless item for sale in the joke shop conceals the more problematic aspects of such self-seeking consumer behaviour. Within modern, neoliberal life, perceptions and constructions of gender and romantic autonomy are not entirely untouched by the all-pervasive principle of the *homo economicus*, or the rationale of self-interest. Rowling’s normalisation of a commodity like the love potion, and the strategies utilised to do so, demonstrate this neoliberal ideology of competitive self-interest permeating the narrative.

Rowling structures such a narrative by drawing upon traditional European narratives of witchcraft, where magic was considered threatening in its coercion or manipulation of others. In an early modern English tract, for example, a detailed account is provided of the trial of a person named Doctor Fian. He is alleged to be a wizard who is guilty of an attempt to bewitch a young woman with a concoction brewed with the help of a hair taken from her body, which would coerce her magically into having a sexual relationship with him against her will (Webster 30). Such a cultural image directly influences Rowling’s literary invention of the Polyjuice Potion. This object is depicted as a

magical concoction which allows the drinker to transform into anyone else, if they can acquire as an ingredient ‘a bit of whoever we want to change into’ (Rowling, *Chamber* 124). Most often in the books, the body part of the intended target is acquired without their consent, and the potion is used in missions which require deception.⁴² The moral justification of this violation of consent, when committed by the good wizards, is provided by demonstrating the subterfuge as a necessary evil, part of a greater quest. While this is usually achieved by depicting the targets as morally compromised, either in terms of the comical bullies Crabbe and Goyle (160-161), or the evil Bellatrix Lestrange (*Hallows* 422), the moral ambiguity of the protagonists’ actions sometimes presents itself in more problematic ways. An example of this is found in the final book, when Hermione magically causes an innocent wizard, desperate to visit his incarcerated wife, to become sick. Her actions are portrayed as necessary if she is to acquire a strand of hair from his head to use in the potion.

The effect was instantaneous. The moment the pastille touched his tongue, the little wizard started vomiting so hard that he did not even notice as Hermione yanked a handful of hairs from the top of his head.

“Oh dear!” she said, as he splattered the alley with sick. “Perhaps you’d better take the day off!”

⁴² Rowling portrays the unpleasantness of the effects of Polyjuice Potion to suggest that although good characters occasionally use it, they do not do so willingly. Harry’s initial encounter with a description of the potion makes him apprehensive that the process would be painful (Rowling, *Chamber* 124), and he later realises the process is indeed deeply uncomfortable (162). This depiction of a painful transformation literalises the uncomfortable, liminal nature of changing into someone else. ‘The multiplication of personality,’ Todorov argues, ‘taken literally, is the immediate consequence of the possible transition between matter and mind’ (116). Therefore, Rowling downplays to a degree the use of Polyjuice potion through a tacit suggestion that it comes at the cost of pain and discomfort.

“No – no!” He choked and retched, trying to continue on his way despite being unable to walk straight. “I must – today – must go”...The wizard had collapsed, heaving, on all fours, still trying to crawl towards the main street (196).

While Harry and his friends are later absolved to an extent in their rescue of the wizard’s wife, along with other wrongfully incarcerated individuals (216-217), the initial violation of consent remains problematic. Much as the paternalistic manipulation of muggle consent by benevolent wizards discussed in Chapter 1, Rowling avoids any introspection into the problematic structure of this act by using foil characters; momentarily inducing sickness in an innocent wizard is depicted as a necessary step towards overthrowing Voldemort himself (196). However, while the polyjuice potion is a rare concoction which individual wizards must brew painstakingly over a month (*Chamber* 125), the love potion is depicted as a market commodity for sale to anyone who possesses buying power.⁴³ This depiction evidences a more systemic and problematic aspect to Rowling’s normalisation of consent violation. Unlike the polyjuice potion, which is created by individual wizards working secretly, the love potion is freely and legally available to anyone in the market. I argue that the presence of such a commodity in the marketplace, and the general indifference of adult wizards about it, is a symptom of the neoliberal construction of magical life. Neoliberal ideology contends that maintenance of the free market is of greater priority than state control of the commodities which circulate therein. This creates a free market system where monopolies invariably dominate, despite the

⁴³ This is first evidenced in the Weasley twins’ joke shop (Rowling, *Prince* 117), but the availability of the potion as a permissible and ostensibly harmless product among students is casually mentioned early in the series by a teacher (*Chamber* 176).

touting of individual competitive action as morally superior (Peck and Tickell 245-249).

I demonstrate in the following sections how the love potion is depicted as a ‘harmless’ commodity, by being normalised through its endorsement by otherwise good, moral characters, and analyse the different narrative strategies used by Rowling in this normalisation. The conflict between the image of the love potion as a joke commodity, and its deeply problematic status as a tool of consent violation, is deliberately downplayed in *Harry Potter* in its construction of autonomy in neoliberal terms of dialectical self-interest. Rowling establishes clearly that the love potion ‘doesn’t really create *love*...this will simply cause a powerful infatuation or obsession’ (Rowling, *Prince* 177). Thus, this magical object is located outside the realm of true, organic love, and in the domain of manipulating desire and obsession. I argue that Rowling uses a number of narrative strategies and framing devices to conceal the true extent of harm such an object can cause. The chief purpose of this commodity is overpowering the target’s independent, cognitive faculties to manufacture a form of artificial attraction. The neoliberal ideology of self-interest, and the moral necessity of allowing the market to freely circulate all kinds of commodities, informs the depiction of the love potion in the texts.

2.4.2 Normalising Consent Violation: Humour, Foils, Desexualisation, and Gender Reversal

The love potion, and its use and misuse, are located within the context of the characters’ developing sexuality and sexual attraction in the books. As with much adolescent literature, the books portray ‘sexuality [as] a powerful tool’

(Trites, “Adolescent” 480), which the characters must learn to navigate as they become mature members of society.⁴⁴ Rowling’s books depict Harry and his friends growing up in terms of this maturation, and this is reflected in the introduction of commodities like love potions which are used in the wielding of this newfound sexual power. Rowling uses four major narrative strategies to downplay the problematic notion of consent violation in using such a tool of empowerment. Firstly, she frames the love potions as joke items, sold and endorsed by characters who are morally good and responsible. Adult voices are used to establish love potions as a normal part of wizardly life, rather than an aberration.⁴⁵ Secondly, she uses foil characters and slapstick humour to frame the effects of love potions as comical rather than serious. Narrative *deus ex machina* is used to abruptly interrupt episodes where use/misuse of love potions could be potentially interrogated. Thirdly, Rowling desexualises romantic attraction in her books, thereby concealing the physical and sexual aspects of consent violation. Finally, the young male characters are generally depicted as less sensitive and understanding of sexual etiquette, requiring the guidance of young women. This framing allows Rowling to depict love potions as being used almost exclusively by women. Such a strategy thereby distances the potion from its real-life counterpart, the date rape drug, which is culturally associated predominantly with male perpetrators.

⁴⁴ Foucault demonstrates how sexuality, and the realisation of the sexual aspect of one’s social identity, is a fundamental path towards becoming full-fledged members of the functional society (*Sexuality* 68-69).

⁴⁵ This normalisation is assisted by the familiar presence of the love potion as a tool of witchcraft in European popular culture, an object present in genres of literature from classical parables (Bandera 33-52) to the medieval romance (Schoepperle 277-296). Rowling sets her magical world in the same temporal space as real European history of witchcraft, as evidenced by Harry’s History of Magic homework, where he has to write an essay on sixteenth-century witch-burning (*Azkaban* 7). This fictitious continuity of history allows Rowling to adapt the love potion along with other magical paraphernalia such as broomsticks and cauldrons into her contemporary wizardly society.

The first strategy lumps the love potion with other harmless commodities used to play pranks or jokes. The narrative emphasis is on their frivolous, somewhat humorous categorisation as ‘joke items’ among other similar commodities for sale in the market. This categorisation is justified by the endorsement of otherwise moral characters. Throughout the narrative, characters who are portrayed as dependable sources of authority are made to vouch for the normalcy of love potions in magical social life. Harry’s first entry into the joke shop where such potions are sold, for instance, is guided by the authoritative voices of the Weasley twins. The twins are consistently depicted as authorities on joke items, using their skill as magical inventors to open their own joke shop (Rowling, *Prince* 113-118). This authority governs the first introduction of love potions as commodities, where the twins give the children a tour of their shop, explaining and describing the colourful, exotic items for sale. The twins’ authoritative voice as producers takes control of the shop tour, and describes the love potion to Harry and his friends.

“There you go,” said Fred proudly. “Best range of love potions you’ll find anywhere.”

Ginny raised an eyebrow skeptically. “Do they work?” she asked.

“Certainly they work, for up to twenty-four hours at a time depending on the weight of the boy in question...”

“...and the attractiveness of the girl,” said George, reappearing suddenly at their side.” (117)

The twins’ description of the love potion in humorous terms, further reinforced by their friendly teasing of their sister about her romantic life (79-80),

acquires legitimacy from their depiction as attractive and morally good characters. Just as Ollivander's authority and brand identity sets the value of his wands, the twins' authority also helps to cement the status of love potions as acceptable commodities. Their problematic nature is thus concealed by shifting them to the category of other, genuinely harmless commodities and eatables which Mullen identifies as belonging 'firmly in the conventional appurtenances of the school story' ("Schooldays" 131). This dilution of the love potion as a normalised everyday item of school life is accepted and acknowledged by Harry and his peers, most overtly when Hermione dissociates it from truly dangerous artefacts by claiming that 'love potions aren't dark or dangerous' (288). If there is an element of rule-breaking involved in using love potions, it is framed as positive and exciting through the endorsement from the twins.⁴⁶ Throughout the texts, their ability to break school rules in acquiring magical commodities and collectibles for their peers is celebrated, rather than condemned as immoral. This is evidenced in the twins' role in illicitly acquiring magical eatables to the great admiration of their friends.

The party went on all day and well into the night. Fred and George Weasley disappeared for a couple of hours and returned with armfuls of bottles of Butterbeer, pumpkin fizz and several bags full of Honeydukes sweets. 'How did you do that?' squealed Angelina Johnson, as George started throwing Peppermint Toads into the crowd (Rowling, *Azkaban* 195).

⁴⁶ The twins' troublemaking behaviour combines a love of pranks with genuine empathy. George Santayana explores the characters of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, created by Mark Twain, as driven by both 'boyish play and love of mischief' as well as 'kindness, humanity, readiness to lend a helping hand to anyone in trouble' (1-2). Rowling constructs the twins in the same fashion, as evidenced by their willingness to put themselves in risky situations to help others (*Phoenix* 579-581; *Hallows* 46-57).

The twins' ability to break rules is thus portrayed as optimistic, contrasted sharply by the narrative dullness of foil characters who are depicted as disciplinarians. David K. Steege, in analysing the influences of the school story on the texts, discusses how Rowling 'perpetuates the common notion of prefects... in a subtle struggle to maintain their position and dignity with the younger students' (147). The figure of Percy Weasley, the twins' pompous elder brother (*Azkaban* 51), is consistently used as a foil to his siblings' humorous spontaneity, and in setting him up as 'self-important and authoritarian,' Rowling depicts him primarily as 'a target for humour, particularly by his twin brothers' (Steege 147). Although (and to some extent, because) the twins are set up as such rule-breakers, their disregard for discipline is never portrayed as cruel or morally problematic, being 'motivated only by what amuses them' (Whited and Grimes 196). Overall, the Weasley twins are generally appreciated in the language of the narrative as boisterous but friendly troublemakers, unlike other 'bullying' figures.⁴⁷ Indeed, Harry uses them consciously as a moral compass. When it is revealed that Harry's father was an unpleasant young bully as a student, Harry tries to justify his behaviour by comparing him with the twins. He fails to rationalise that the twins would ever behave like his father in 'dangling someone upside-down for the fun of it' (Rowling, *Phoenix* 575). This depiction of the twins as moral characters legitimises their endorsement of the love potion as a normal and acceptable joke commodity to purchase.

⁴⁷ Rowling draws these character types from the school story tradition, which constructed a clear demarcation between those who wield violence and aggression as a weapon against weaker peers, and those who channel their exuberance in harmless fun. In many ways, troublemaking and mischief are actively allowed in such climates as a necessary outlet for masculine self-assertion, always regulated by the consensual and optimistic presence of peers (Puccio 57-74).

Further, Rowling deliberately depicts adult characters as indifferent to the morality of using love potions. While there is a consistent reminder that certain joke items are banned in Hogwarts School (Rowling, *Goblet* 162), the adult voices of teachers are often used to normalise the love potion as part of magical life. As early as the second book, Rowling depicts a teacher as casually encouraging students to learn ‘how to whip up a Love Potion’ in the spirit of Valentine’s Day (*Chamber* 176). Similarly, in the sixth book, the Potions teacher demonstrates Amortentia, or ‘the most powerful love potion in the world’ (*Prince* 176) to teach a lesson in the classroom. However, while he acknowledges that this is ‘the most dangerous and powerful potion in this room,’ his pedagogy does not offer any moral interrogation of using the potion itself in the first place (177). The love potion is thus framed in the books as a magical item which empowers the user in their exercise of romantic autonomy, and its acceptability is endorsed by authoritative voices. The aspect of the potion’s function to empower an user by simultaneously *disempowering the target of use* is concealed through such endorsements.⁴⁸

On the only two narrative instances where individual cases of love potion usage are portrayed, Rowling uses foil characters and abrupt interruptions of the narrative to avoid introspection. The first of these instances involves Ron, who is frequently employed as a comic foil to other characters. He is often characterised by his bluntness and regular display of confusion (and sometimes, in his treatment of Hermione, derision) towards more cerebral

⁴⁸ Manipulation of and compromise on reciprocal consent has always been a part of social courtship rituals in European societies. However, particularly since the 1960s, courtship rituals tend to be atomised and individualistic, therefore leading to increasing friction in reciprocity when it comes to consent (La Cerra 151-174). The love potion represents this conflicting view of autonomy as necessarily coercive and dialectically opposed to reciprocal consent.

issues. It is Ron's behaviour through which Rowling frames the use of the love potion as undesirable but not overly serious. When Harry refuses the romantic overtures of a fellow student named Romilda, the latter tries to trick him into consuming a love potion hidden in chocolates. Harry avoids this, as the ever-sensible figure of Hermione warns him against this act of subterfuge, and the potion is accidentally ingested by Ron instead (*Prince* 366-369). The morally problematic aspects of Ron's loss of consent are concealed through the comical language used to describe the episode. Ron's over-the-top buffoonish behaviour provides a slapstick comic relief, which offers humour as the chief filter through which this incident is depicted. This episode portrays Ron punching Harry, and while the latter levitates him into the air in rebuttal, Ron keeps asking him to introduce him to Romilda:

“Romilda?” he repeated. “Did you say Romilda? Harry - do you know her? Can you introduce me?”

Harry stared at the dangling Ron, whose face now looked tremendously hopeful, and fought a strong desire to laugh. A part of him — the part closest to his throbbing right ear — was quite keen on the idea of letting Ron down and watching him run amok until the effects of the potion wore off...but on the other hand, they were supposed to be friends, Ron had not been himself when he had attacked, and Harry thought that he would deserve another punching if he permitted Ron to declare undying love for Romilda Vane. (369)

This use of slapstick to frame the episode as largely humorous is complemented by a second strategy of shifting the narrative from the misuse of the love potion to a grim incident of far deeper implications. After the love potion episode, Ron is almost immediately poisoned as part of a conspiracy by

Voldemort (372-373), and narrative focus shifts entirely to the struggle to keep Ron alive. Rowling uses this *deus ex machina*, of introducing a completely different context to disallow further introspection into the morality of the love potion, in the other narrative instance as well. In the sixth book, it is revealed that Voldemort was conceived while his non-magical father was under the influence of a love potion. This potion was secretly given to him by his magical mother, Merope Gaunt, and the man abandoned her the moment the influence of the potion had ended (*Prince* 201-202). Rowling introduces a truly complex moment in Harry's moral development, when she portrays him considering the unfair and difficult circumstances of his enemy's birth and childhood, where the image of rape looms in the background. However, while the possibility of questioning the morals of love potion usage itself is raised, it is immediately interrupted by the voice of Dumbledore. His adult voice changes the context of discussion to a more subjective assessment, shifting the blame onto the individual user's moral character, rather than the potion itself:

"In any case, as you are about to see, Merope refused to raise her wand even to save her own life."

"She wouldn't even stay alive for her son?"

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. "Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?"

"No," said Harry quickly, "but she had a choice, didn't she, not like my mother
—"

“Your mother had a choice too,” said Dumbledore gently. “Yes, Merope Riddle chose death in spite of a son who needed her, but do not judge her too harshly, Harry. She was greatly weakened by long suffering and she never had your mother’s courage.” (Rowling, *Prince* 246)

Any potential introspection of whether Voldemort’s conception can be considered an act of rape, and of the love potion as an accessory to the crime, is avoided by shifting the discussion to individual morality. Lily Potter’s greater courage is provided as a foil to Merope’s innate lack of the same, before Dumbledore’s voice abruptly draws narrative attention away to Harry’s next lesson (246). As the self-assured hero of fantasy, Harry ‘strives towards his goal never doubting the rightness or the primacy of his cause’ (Hourihan 57).⁴⁹ While Merope’s actions lead to tragedy, her tragic end is ascribed to her individual moral weakness, and Harry moves on towards his quest for more knowledge. Her use of a problematic tool of consent manipulation itself is not only not interrogated, but normalised by Dumbledore’s adult voice, who claims that ‘it would have seemed more romantic to her’ to use a love potion to secure Tom Riddle’s consent (Rowling, *Prince* 202). By framing instances of using the potion through foil characters like the weak-willed Merope, the overbearing Romilda, or the comical Ron, Rowling portrays these episodes primarily in terms of individual behaviour. Any unpleasantness rising from these instances is ascribed to the subjective characteristics of the individuals, rather than the problematic nature of the potion itself.

⁴⁹ The hero, in such narratives, belongs to the same aristocratic elite as the nemesis he overthrows. The ultimate conflict is therefore between two opposing modes of aristocracies, with the more benevolent one triumphing as champion to restore the balance (Mendlesohn, “Crowning” 169).

A fundamental attribute of the love potion, as both these episodes demonstrate, is the deceit inherent in its usage. It is not meant to be ingested voluntarily, but associated with the act of tricking or deceiving an unsuspecting victim into having it. This image of ‘slipping’ the potion into someone’s drink necessarily invokes a serious contemporary social problem involving narcotics commonly referred to as ‘date-rape drugs.’ The love potion, in its purpose and intent, is disturbingly similar to such narcotics. However, Rowling dissociates her magical items from their real-world counterparts by employing a third strategy of desexualising romance in her texts. When her characters realise and exercise their romantic autonomy, the sexual aspect of it is diluted or even negated. There is no detailed discussion of teenage sexual experience or feelings of physical attraction, and romantic narratives are mostly sanitised. Thus, Romilda’s attempt to coerce Harry’s consent by giving him a love potion is tempered largely by the narrative insistence that her intentions are limited to ‘hinting heavily that she would like to go to Slughorn’s Christmas party with him’ (281). Romantic attraction is largely framed in social terms of companionship and going on dates, rather than overt sexual desire. In this context, the correlation between the love potion’s function to overpower the victim’s consent and the threat of sexual violence is concealed. In contemporary discussions on the use of narcotics and alcohol to manipulate consent, the physical body of the victim and its violation is central to conversations on violence.⁵⁰ By framing the love potion within a social context where sexual

⁵⁰ This prioritisation of the body is common to both legal scholarship which has examined criminal cases (Abbey, “Rape” 127-154), and to cultural critics investigating social perceptions of the crime (Anderson and Mathieu 208-239; Corcoran and Thomas 64-77).

action is largely absent from the narration of romantic activity, Rowling removes the threat of bodily violation from the use of the love potion.

This sanitisation of the love potion is also reinforced by Rowling's final strategy of inverting the gender associations of real-life violation of sexual consent through narcotics. Statistical analyses demonstrate that globally, the victims of date rape are overwhelmingly female, while purchase and use of the common date-rape drugs is largely restricted to male users.⁵¹ In Rowling's books, this social reality is inverted through the depiction of the love potion as both targeted at female consumers in the market, as well as more frequently used by women. The potions as commodities are introduced as 'violently pink products around which a cluster of excited girls was giggling enthusiastically' (Rowling, *Prince* 117). This gendering is further structured by the somewhat stereotypical description in Rowling's texts of girls as generally more aware of emotional and romantic affairs. They are more mature than the boys, who are affably clueless. Mostly, this narrative device is used to provide humorous narrative events of male characters learning to understand the intricacies of heterosocial etiquette, as evidenced in Hermione's admonitions of Harry's disastrous date with Cho Chang:

"Oh, Harry" she said sadly. "Well, I'm sorry, but you were a bit tactless."

"Me, tactless?" said Harry, outraged. "One minute we were getting on fine, next minute she was telling me that Roger Davies asked her out and how she

⁵¹ This data is confirmed both by scholars who have investigated criminal reports of date rape (Muehlenhard et al. 144-146) and by gender activists who have interviewed criminals convicted of date rape (Valentine 22-29).

used to go and snog Cedric in that stupid teashop - how was I supposed to feel about that?"

"Well, you see," said Hermione, with the patient air of someone explaining that one plus one equals two to an over-emotional toddler, "you shouldn't have told her that you wanted to meet me halfway through your date."

"But, but," spluttered Harry, "but - you told me to meet you at twelve and to bring her along, how was I supposed to do that without telling her?" (Rowling, *Phoenix* 504)

Harry's inability to understand how he has offended his love interest, and Hermione's exasperated, matronly patience in educating him, provides a humorous and warm account of the bumbling boy hero's socio-romantic development aided by his wise female friend. However, in the context of the love potion, this gendering also serves the purpose of distancing the potion from its real-world equivalent. Melanie J. Cordova analyses this characterisation of Hermione in terms of 'her knowledge-bearer role' (28), in which she performs from the very beginning of the series as a 'reluctant caretaker' for the immature, bumbling boys (22). By thus portraying women like Hermione as more knowledgeable in romantic matters than the boys, Rowling distances her narrative from the contemporary cultural image of the perpetrators largely as experienced men, and victims as naive women (Francis, *Date*; Mino). This strategy allows Rowling to represent the love potion as a largely harmless commodity. Its role in manipulating consent is presented not in the sinister context of abuse and gender violence, but in the frivolous, even playful language of pranks and jokes. The normalisation of the love potion in *Harry Potter*, which Rowling succeeds in through the use of the four strategies discussed in

this section, is informed by the neoliberal understanding of autonomy as competitive. The image of the love potion allows her to portray the romantic maturation of her child characters, and their subsequent empowerment, in terms which are deeply influenced by the individualised vision of autonomy as self-interest.

2.4.3 Violation of Consent: An Inevitable Outcome of Autonomy as Self-Interest

Romantic activity, and the discovery of one's maturing romantic interests, is an important aspect of Rowling's texts. Existing scholarship has analysed the books' structuring of multiple subjective gender positions for women, as well as Hermione's coming-of-age narrative which parallels Harry's.⁵² My analysis of the love potion demonstrates that all such subjective gender positions, and the social relationships between actors on the romantic register, are founded on the fundamental centrality of self-interest to such autonomous activity. Neoliberal self-interest is a principle which seeks to govern and re-organise not only contemporary economic activity, but also social and subjective agency in such spheres as personal and fundamental as romantic/sexual desire and behaviour. Within the principles of neoliberal social behaviour, as Jeff Sugarman argues, 'relationships are reduced to means-ends calculations, and pursued solely for self-interest, and emotional self-optimisation' (Sugarman 111).

While Rowling does uphold the role and power of selfless love in the larger quest narrative, the model of social behaviour concerning relationships as

⁵² Gender scholarship has analysed how representations of female characters in the books have been fixed through discursive patterns, subjective positions, as well as expressions of desire (Cherland 273-282, Cordova 19-33). Other critics have interrogated the contrasting impact of male and female characters regarding similar events in the texts (Croft, "Hermione" 129-142). I have drawn upon both forms of criticism in analysing Hermione's role in the broomstick debate analysed earlier, as well as here regarding the reversed gender expectations regarding consent and the love potion.

Sugarman discusses still asserts itself in the more immediate instances through the depiction of objects like the love potion. The social world where characters discover and exercise romantic autonomy is governed by a distinctly neoliberal emphasis on the atomised ethos of maximising self-interest. Identifying this as the ideological motivator behind the normalisation of the love potion demonstrates it as the specific politico-economic principle which the often criticised conservatism of the texts entails. The unproblematic and humorous depiction of the love potion, as demonstrated, is guided by this pervasive cultural process, whereby neoliberal self-interest penetrates deep into everyday exercises of romantic autonomy.

In this ideological construction of autonomy, the individual consumer functions through the *subversion and overpowering* of the autonomy of their intended target; the consumer of this commodity can express her/his autonomy *only through* the negation of another's. This vision of autonomy as competition has deeply pervasive influences on how romantic/sexual interest and action is portrayed by Rowling. The love potion, in this regard, functions as a site of conflict not simply between two subjects in the process of a romantic transaction, but also between two reciprocal autonomies. It needs to be pointed out here that Rowling demarcates her 'good' characters from the 'bad' in their individual decisions to use/misuse such commodities; as demonstrated earlier, individuals who use the love potion are lacking in some moral principle or the other. However, the existence of the potion itself for potential misuse, and casual references to it as harmless even by Hogwarts teachers (Rowling, *Chamber* 176), is not questioned in the texts. Questions of moral action are

transferred instead to individual choice in using the potion, rather than its availability as a market commodity.

Much as in the broomstick episode, this strategy locates questions of use/misuse around the locus of individual responsibility, while suggesting that such objects, regardless of their potential for harm, shall continue to circulate in the market as a given. On the ideological level, this construction is resonant with the neoliberal transformation of the ‘purpose of the state from a responsibility to protect its citizens against the exigencies of the market to ensuring protection of the market itself’ (Wren and Waller 500). Rowling’s depiction of the love potion as a commodity whose existence itself is morally acceptable in a society is deeply informed by this ideology of self-interest and the sanctity of absolute choice. In a neoliberal worldview, where autonomy is governed by the rationale of self-interest, and the socio-economic status quo is no longer involved in protecting its citizens against the market, the securing of consent is increasingly undermined by the fundamental understanding of autonomy as conflict with the autonomy of others.⁵³

Conclusion

Rowling structures her fantasy world as very much part of our own, contemporary society, as a wainscot fantasy for the modern world. The depiction of the market and commodities therein are familiar representations of

⁵³ Sociological research into the prevalent rape culture in a number of spaces has demonstrated the pervasive ideological impact of neoliberal governmentality on social relations. These critics have identified a psychological understanding of autonomy as assertive and performative to be one of the primary reason behind gender violence across academic hierarchies (Herring, “Rape” 44-62), as well as a factor behind domestic violence among young couples under 30 (Primoratz 33-45; Konow 52-67). In such a cultural atmosphere, Rowling’s use of the love potion normalises in popular perception this neoliberal vision of autonomy as primarily atomised and driven by self-interest.

modern commodity culture. Her transformation of plot coupons into commodities makes economic activity central to her characters' development as magic users. This transformation is governed by the neoliberal ideology which immerses individual identity in commodity culture, offering economic power and purchase as the key modes of social life.⁵⁴ My analysis of Rowling's depiction of magical objects as commodities demonstrates that notions of autonomy and individual activity in her narrative are structured by three ideological principles. Firstly, the framing of magical empowerment within images of economic empowerment offers a vision of freedom in terms of purchasing power. Not only is this model of behaviour depicted as economic autonomy, but it makes the principles and rationale of economic activity equally relevant to the social and romantic autonomy of individuals in the books. The visibility of this economic rationale, however, is largely concealed through the use of foil characters who flaunt their wealth, and by framing economic activity within the images of more abstract, social action.

Secondly, this autonomy is made contingent upon a rationale which the characters do not organically develop, but are offered as passive, downloaded information by guardian figures. While the narrative celebrates young wizards purchasing exciting new magical objects at the market, both the value of such objects and the regulations around what they are to buy are fixed by adult authority. Purchasing power (and through it, autonomy) are thus made contingent upon a rationale which is preset for consumers by the structure of society itself. This serves the ideological need to interpellate characters in the

⁵⁴ Economic critics have identified this trend with relation to increased consumption of luxury objects (Lears; Roberts, "Consumption") and with the growing importance of brand loyalty to personal identity (Bronner, *Goods*; Susman).

books into subjects. As with the house system discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.1.3, Rowling represents her characters as acting voluntarily and willingly, while subtly making their autonomy contingent upon a rationale which is not their own. In the context of neoliberal governmentality, this successfully conceals the pre-fixed set of rules and principles, upon which narratives of individual choice are offered.

Finally, any possibility of fully understanding or controlling this underlying rationale is denied through the depiction of magic as inexplicable. It is suggested that an individual can wield magical autonomy only if she/he adheres to the principles of this underlying invisible hand. In a world where magical commodities resist the control of their users, individual action is offered as the only possible mode of autonomy. The impossibility to affect or even fully understand *how* the rationale of magic comes to be, or the manner in which it judges and interrupts individual action, makes the hierarchical structure of the status quo itself a fixed, common sense reality. This shifts questions of use/misuse of commodities to notions of individual moral responsibility. While this offers an optimistic vision of child characters taking their own decisions, it renders invisible the functioning of the market and of adult producers who create and regulate the circumstances of those decisions in the first place. Thus, potentially dangerous commodities like the broomstick or problematic items like love potions are allowed to freely circulate in the market. However, when the questions of their potential misuse arise, it is individual self-responsibility that is made the locus of moral judgment, absolving the market's role in structuring such situations to begin with. Rowling's narrative thus serves the fundamental neoliberal function of transforming a regulated, deeply hierarchical mode of

socio-economic life into the cultural vision of individual autonomy, choice, and empowerment. As demonstrated, the dual identity of the object as commodity and object as magically sentient is the strategy that allows Rowling to structure her narratives in this manner.

It follows then, that within such a restrictive worldview, where personal autonomy is structured as fundamentally competitive and dependent on individual self-interest, the illusion of voluntary, willing exercise of autonomy must be carefully maintained. It is difficult for Rowling to avoid depictions of class resentment or conflict when the status quo of her magical world is a necessarily hierarchical one. As I demonstrate in the following chapter, she resolves these conflicts and offers visions of economically unmotivated, emotional and optimistic social life in her books. This is achieved through the sublimation of economic exchange and practices in social relationships between her characters. When issues of economic inequality are raised in the books, they are resolved or avoided at the level of individual social behaviour, sidestepping any introspection of *how* this inequality comes to be. Social life at Hogwarts is organised in terms of a gift economy, where students form social bonds by exchanging and collecting commodities as gifts. In disguising the pervasive presence of commodity economy at the heart of this gifting culture, Rowling makes social bonds rather than economic ones the focal point of her narratives. Within such a culture, I argue that who gifts what, and for what observable purpose in the books, largely defines the moral spectrum between good and bad characters. The economic foundations of gift culture are concealed in this depiction, and characters who are moral foils to Harry are portrayed not in terms

of their economic aspirations, but the fact that they make those aspirations *visible* in their use of gifts.

CHAPTER 3: Social Relationships and Philanthropy: Collectibles, Gift Culture, and Economies of Indebtedness

Introduction: Chapter Outline

I argue in this chapter that Rowling avoids a negative or oppressive depiction of her hierarchical magical world by concealing the economic rationale of self-interest behind the patterns of behaviour her characters exhibit. She achieves this by portraying the relationships among her characters as primarily social ones. The strategies she employs to achieve this are the depiction of social relations at Hogwarts in terms of a gift culture, and centralising the collection of items as a fundamental part of social life. The economic rationale of *homo economicus* is not made visible at the narrative level, because it is co-opted into the social behaviour of her characters.¹ Questions of who collects items and why, as well as how gifts are given, demarcate good/rational social and moral behaviour from bad/irrational patterns. This moral demarcation does not allow introspection into the economic rationale behind social behaviour. Instead, the books portray characters as moral if they are successful in keeping the rationale invisible, and therefore hegemonic. As this hegemonic hierarchy is thus made immutable by magic, the only mode of autonomy available in the books is individual, atomised action. Rowling avoids such a magical world as being

¹ Rowling uses this strategy to distance the economic roots of her ideological hegemony from the narrative. By portraying colourful images of celebration and peer group relationships in terms of gifts and collectibles, she prioritises the social aspect of the aesthetic pole of her text. As Iser argues, in a reading experience, the aesthetic pole is the space of the reader's comprehension, while the artistic pole is saturated with the author's textual and ideological constructions (109-116). By offering readers the vision of wizardly life as overtly social, Rowling avoids depicting her magical world as visibly governed by a rationale of self-interest.

depicted as oppressive or pessimistic through the insistence that all interpersonal relationships in her wizardly world are fundamentally social. The eucatastrophic success and appeal of her narrative, Emily Griesinger comments, draws from the narrative assertion that ‘courage, loyalty, and friendship will overcome hatred, bigotry, and fear’ (477).²

At the same time, Rowling’s use of collectibles culture and gift economy to portray magical life reveals the individualistic economic rationale which governs such ostensibly social, voluntary behaviour. James Davison Hunter comments that in consolatory narratives, moral discourse needs to be portrayed as proliferating within a robust moral community for it to have meaning (216), an argument which has been applied to Rowling’s texts with reference to Hogwarts as a moral community which teaches how to differentiate good from evil (Glanzer 525-528). Much like the images of ‘christian friendship’ in the traditional school story (Puccio 57-74), Rowling has an ideological need to portray her characters as essentially social beings. This narrative depiction of behaviour as predominantly social, and the moral messages it transmits, is what I analyse here.

I demonstrate in this chapter three strategies used by Rowling to depict the social relations between her characters, concealing the contingency of such relations on a hidden rationale of self-interest. Firstly, I analyse the centrality of collection and accumulation of items to social behaviour in the books. Social

² Haridhan Goswami analyses the primacy of social relation formation in children’s literature, and their relevance to the development of children into functional individuals with the capability to pursue their own well-being (575-588). Stephens argues, however, that social and cultural relations in texts for children are often structured dialectically through certain ideological considerations (22-29). I aim to build on these arguments, and by demonstrating how gifts and collectibles are circulated as the units of social discourse in the books, analyse the roots of such relations in the underlying rationale of self-interest.

behaviour among wizards, as described by her, involves the collection of items varying from children's collectibles, to magically materialised bits of memory, to historical objects of symbolic importance. Collection as a mode of social life has been increasingly prominent since the 1970s, with the popularisation among middle-class populaces an 'elite form of collecting' which had earlier been restricted to rich, specialist collectors (Herring, *Hoarders* 58). To portray collection as a legitimate model of social behaviour, I argue that Rowling shows the different forms of collection in her books as 'dependent upon [rational] principles of organisation and categorisation' (Stewart, *Longing* 153).

Characters who collect objects are dictated by the rationale of individual self-interest, which imparts social value to their collectibles.³ My analysis focuses on the collection of collectible commodities, symbolic or abstract items, and house points as specialised currency for school social life. All three categories of collection, I shall demonstrate, are governed by different rationales of self-interest to increase one's social capital and ally oneself to social networks. As a foil to this rational mode of collection, I shall demonstrate how irrational collectors or hoarders are largely portrayed as foolish at best, or irresponsible at worst.

Secondly, I analyse the prevalence of gift culture exhibited at Hogwarts, and how Rowling depicts social relations being formed through the exchange of

³ There are several other instances of collection, apart from the ones I analyse. These include Ron's obsessive collection of Chudley Cannons merchandise, which falls somewhere between hoarding and rational collection (Rowling, *Chamber* 45), the hoarding of creatures from dragons (*Stone* 134) to the possibly illegal Blast-Ended Skrewts (*Goblet* 322) and Mrs. Figgs' cats (*Stone* 44), Kreacher's hoarding of family heirlooms from the Blacks (*Phoenix* 210), Hepzibah Smith's collection of trinkets (*Prince* 288), and Moody's paranoid collection of every category of protective magical instrument (*Goblet* 317). For the scope of this analysis, I have chosen a select few modes of collection, which vary between the poles of rational collection and hoarding. I demonstrate how Rowling portrays as wholesome and normal parts of social life those modes which serve a distinct purpose to the character's social or intellectual identity.

circulating objects (van Hoof 21) in pointedly non-economic terms. Lewis Hyde comments, in his seminal work on gift theory, that ‘when gifts circulate within a group, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in their wake’ (*Gift* xxv). These relationships are expressed primarily in personal, emotional terms, thus dissociating the exchange from the cold objectivity of economic behaviour, structuring a form of ‘decentralised cohesiveness’ (xxv). However, gift exchange is not entirely divorced from the notion of self-interest. Pierre Bourdieu argues that a gift given necessitates a social compulsion for a reciprocal gift, but unlike economic commodity which is exchanged immediately for money, gifts are exchanged with ‘the lapse of time interposed’ (171). I demonstrate how this lapse of time structures the celebratory, optimistic portrayal of Harry and his friends receiving gifts from peers or adults as ‘free and disinterested’ objects with no ostensible expectation of a return gift (Hilsdale, “Gift” 171). In reality, as I analyse with regards to different forms of gifts Harry receives and gives, his actions are guided by self-interest.⁴ In return for his gift-giving, facilitated by his immense amount of inherited wealth, Harry is able to form alliances with social groups, as well as reinforce his authority of social status over inferiors. The returns he receives, although not directly economic, are driven by self-interest, and aid him in his final emergence as the saviour of the magical world.

⁴ By demonstrating characters giving gifts without any immediate expectation of reciprocation, Rowling constructs generosity or individual niceness as the central model of moral, social behaviour. I shall demonstrate this behaviour predominantly with respect to Harry, but also those he forms strong social bonds with over the course of the books. Harry’s generosity, I argue, is constructed as a selfless trait which marks him as an inherently good person. Thus, the assessment that Harry gives away ‘actual gifts, with no expectation of a gift in return,’ because ‘they give Harry pleasure’ (Westman 311), can be expanded by analysing what this pleasure signifies. I build on the cultural and anthropological scholarship which has assessed the mechanisms of gift economy (Mauss, *Gift*; Appadurai, “Things” 3-63) and analysed how such economies only ‘pretend to put the law of self-interest into abeyance’ (Bourdieu 171).

Finally, to maintain the illusion of social relationships as divorced from any economic or political aspirations, it is necessary to perpetuate an image of neutrality in gifting. This entails the portrayal of characters giving gifts away without either economic considerations, or any specific expectations in mind. Revealing such expectations would transform gifting culture into a barter system; an economic structure which, like commodity culture, is utilitarian rather than based on displays of generosity. I analyse Rowling's use of foil characters to demonstrate how she deems certain modes of gift exchange undesirable based on the *visibility* of an identifiable agenda behind the exchange. Only freely given gifts, which aim to fulfill the receiver's happiness rather than the donor's intention, are celebrated in the narrative as successful transactions. This analysis shall help demonstrate how notions of niceness, interpersonal relations, and social behaviour are carefully insulated from their economic roots at the narrative level. The aim of this chapter is to thus demonstrate the strategies used by Rowling to ensure that social and moral behaviour are not only contingent upon the existence of necessary hierarchies in the books, but conceal them through the superficial performance of philanthropy.⁵

⁵ Karin E. Westman bases Harry's moral superiority on his propensity to give away gifts without expecting anything in return (311). This scholarship is supported by a number of scholars who similarly laud Rowling's moral universe for its depiction of acts of simple niceness or affection (Knuth 112-140; Griesinger 461-479; Hill, "Evils" 413-423). Yet other critics have argued that the moral vision of the books is stultifying due to its refusal to address underlying hierarchical problems (Mendlesohn 159-181; Bodinger-deUriarte 67-69; Zipes, *Sticks* 121-144; Nikolajeva, *Power* 27-48). I build on both perspectives, and demonstrate that Rowling succeeds in portraying a conservative moral model as optimistic and warm through her concealment of self-interest in the formation of social bonds as depicted in the books. This concealment is an ideological effect of neoliberalism, which assuages class resentment through performative gestures of philanthrocapitalism; the spending of private money for ostensibly morally motivated, charitable purposes, while concealing the immense wealth gap between those who spend and those who depend on public benefits which exists in the first place (Bishop, "Philanthrocapitalism" 473-490; Edwards, "Poverty" 35-42).

3.1. Collection as Social Behaviour: Rational Collection, and Tournament of Values

Rowling uses collection as a mode of social life in her world-building, drawing upon the increasing importance of this activity in the real world. The accumulation of collectibles as a dominant mode of social behaviour has gained prominence since the advent of neoliberal governmentality in the 1970s, rising sharply in the 1990s with the penetration of the market into new facets of life. Existing scholarship has described this phenomenon as ‘the creation of a new sport... a new form of investment... and a new form of postmodern aesthetic’ (Halperin and Glick 548). As I demonstrate in this section, all three definitions can be applied to collection culture as Rowling demonstrates it. I shall address three categories of collectibles in this section. Firstly, I analyse the depiction of familiar children’s collectibles which saturate school culture at Hogwarts, and how these items are not hoarded unthinkingly, but utilised in strengthening social identity. These objects are normalised in the narrative as functional blocks of everyday wizardly life. Hoarding of objects, as a foil, is demonstrated to be irrational and of little value. Simultaneously, as with the broomstick analysed in Chapter 2, the narrative instances of children willingly and excitedly collecting and exchanging such objects hides the economic principles which create the desire for such objects to begin with.

Secondly, I move on to analysing the collection of more abstract items, from historical artefacts to memories, social allegiances, and objects of symbolic value. Each of these patterns of collection, I demonstrate, are based on the underlying rationale of individual self-interest. All of these patterns are predominantly portrayed as social behaviour, rather than overtly economic self-

assertion; the rationality of collection is ‘dependent upon the social milieu in which the collective activity is carried out’ (Belk, *Consumer* 1-2, 141). Finally, I argue that the collection of house points structures the central mode of school life at Hogwarts, and functions as a tournament of values.⁶ The characters actively participate in this tournament, and internalise the motivations behind house rivalry as voluntary social behaviour. This internalisation is reinforced by the social behaviour of teachers who often exercise their own liberty (and often favouritism) to also use the points system as currency to take their own social, individually motivated stances. The tournament of values, therefore, succeeds as a ‘field configuring event’ (Moeran 139).⁷ The configuration as triumph and loss at the tournament predominantly in terms of social relations conceals the economically structured rationale of self-interest that actually governs house points collection.

3.1.1 Collectibles in Children’s Culture: Rational Collection vs Irrational Hoarding

For the functioning of a neoliberal governmentality, collection cannot be arbitrary. The rationale of self-interest necessitates the accumulation of items which impart value, in turn increasing the collector’s authority and status within the society. Jean Baudrillard demonstrates the four fundamental categories of

⁶ Tournaments of value are defined by Appadurai as ‘complex, periodic events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life’ (“Introduction” 21). They provide an insulated space within which individuals can compete against each other without overtly identifying as economic competitors. A specialised currency is used as reward for competitions in tournaments of value, and Rowling makes the house points this currency. House points cannot be purchased with money, hence the inter-house competition is safely dissociated from any overt economic aspect. At the same time, the collection/loss of house points are constitutive of important and passionate social relations among peers and with teachers at Hogwarts, and therefore, as I shall demonstrate, driven subtly by considerations of self-interest.

⁷ These configured fields, insulated from the recognisably economic market, serve the purpose of structuring a fresh register of values participants attach to the currency (in this case house points); cultural, social, traditional, or emotional. The proliferation of these different registers of values conceal the rationale of self-interest, most easily associated with economic value, under the disguise of an entirely extra-economic playing field (Lampel and Meyer 144-188).

value in modern society; functional, exchange, symbolic, and sign (7-21).⁸ In this section, I shall discuss two categories of tangible collectibles, which impart exchange and sign value respectively, and are consequently portrayed by Rowling as rational, normalised artefacts of social life. As foils, she also represents the collection of objects which impart negligible or no value to the user, and are hence depicted as eccentric or irresponsible examples of hoarding. The difference between collection and hoarding serves to consolidate a rational model of collection.

I begin with the pattern of collection involving the most recognisable category of collectibles in contemporary capitalist life. These are market commodities, specifically designed to be accumulated over time through repetitive purchase. Predominantly targeted towards children and young adults, these collectibles are ‘designed so you would try fifty times, and when you finally got to the goal feel a great sense of achievement and joy’ (Bakan 22). The hope of getting increasingly desirable results, therefore, transforms consumption into an accumulative model of collection. This model is sustained by the modern neoliberal culture where ‘brands have become an inseparable part of children’s maturing consciousness,’ and collectibles are produced, marketed, and distributed for target consumer groups whose age demographic has steadily widened from ‘teenagers with pocket money’ to ‘tweens, children aged 8-14’ (Hamilton, “Capitalism” 6). Rowling draws upon real-world collectibles to

⁸ Each register of value is dependent on how the object in question can be utilised by the owner/collector. Functional value derives from how an object may be used, in terms of direct application for the purpose of some efficiency. Exchange value derives from what an object may be bartered for, and is the characteristic of currency, monetary or non-monetary. Symbolic value depends on what an object represents by association to the user or his peers, while the sign value of an object is dependent on whether it can be displayed to signal something (Baudrillard 7-21). These four categories of value are by no means mutually exclusive, the same object can hold two or more registers of value depending on the individual. But in any single given act of use, only one register is predominantly utilised.

portray magical and exotic commodities her characters collect. At the same time, the rationale behind collecting such commodities is guided by social behaviour.⁹ The importance of money in accumulating collectibles is largely concealed by the insistence on the social value of these items.

The Chocolate Frogs are the most familiar example of collectibles in the texts. Highly popular commodities among children in the texts, these are not just delicious chocolate eatables, but come with collectible cards of famous witches and wizards, pictures of whom move around in the cards themselves (Rowling, *Stone* 77). Harry's fascination in discovering this wonderful new magical collectible is portrayed clearly in the narrative.

Harry stared as Dumbledore sidled back into the picture on his card and gave him a small smile. Ron was more interested in eating the frogs than looking at the Famous Witches and Wizards cards, but Harry couldn't keep his eyes off them. Soon he had not only Dumbledore and Morgana, but Hengist of Woodcroft, Alberic Grunnion, Circe, Paracelsus and Merlin. He finally tore his eyes away from the druidess Cliodna, who was scratching her nose (77-78).

Harry's first introduction to the card is marked by his curiosity to discover more about the new magical world he has been introduced to. The characters depicted in the cards are all wizardly celebrities, and provide child collectors information about them. The economic autonomy necessary to collect

⁹ A number of economic and market research scholars have analysed the rapidly increasing trend among children, including very young ones, of acquiring collectibles. Their scholarship argues that this trend is considerably helped by the increasing importance of collectibles in organising social behaviour among children, from school classrooms (McAllister and Cornwell 195-205), to the increased impact of advertising on young consumers (Gilkeson and Lamb 14-21), to models of addiction among collectors, actively encouraged by market strategies which entice prospective buyers with increasingly appealing rewards till an economic 'tipping point' (Gao et al. 143-156). Collectibles, under the neoliberal market, are becoming increasingly important currency in children's peer culture. As I demonstrate here, Rowling draws upon this phenomenon, and portrays Chocolate Frog Cards in particular as essential to magical social life.

such cards is downplayed in this episode, as they are more overtly depicted as the currency of social interaction among children. In the story, Ron has collected about five hundred of them, and he obsessively continues to purchase more. This is driven by his hope to find cards featuring Ptolemy or Agrippa, and he offers to exchange his cards with Harry if he finds any of these (77).¹⁰ The collection of such commodities is thus revealed to have a social purpose, particularly among children, who exchange these cards with each other. Harry's friendship with Ron, which endures throughout the series, is initiated in this portrayal of the children bonding over sharing and collecting commodities. As currency of social intercourse, therefore, these cards fulfill the condition of having exchange value. In the same episode, Ron introduces Harry to another similar commodity, Bertie Botts' Every Flavour Beans. These are consumable candies that can come in any flavour ranging from 'chocolate and peppermint and marmalade' to 'spinach and liver and tripe,' or even the odd "bogey-flavoured one" (78). Like the cards, they rely upon their element of surprise to attract consumers, as children keep purchasing and trying more of them in the hope of getting a desirable flavour. The social activity between the children in this episode is thus framed within the less overt economic purchase of collectibles as 'individualised consumer' (Littler 82). Rowling highlights the social aspect of this activity by normalising these collectibles as everyday accoutrements of interaction among her child characters.

¹⁰ Harry is also later aided at a crucial juncture through his collection of chocolate frog cards. It is through the card that he first discovers Dumbledore's partnership with Nicolas Flamel (Rowling, *Stone* 77), which later leads to the discovery of a great secret which aids him in his quest to save the Philosopher's Stone (134).

Ron and Hermione did not turn up for nearly an hour, by which time the food trolley had already gone by. Harry, Ginny and Neville had finished their pumpkin pasties and were busy swapping Chocolate Frog Cards when the compartment door slid open and they walked in, accompanied by Crookshanks and a shrilly hooting Pigwidgeon in his cage.

“I’m starving,” said Ron, stowing Pigwidgeon next to Hedwig, grabbing a Chocolate Frog from Harry and throwing himself into the seat next to him’ (Rowling, *Phoenix* 170-171).

This episode, like other scenes, frames the activity of collection as integral to the social behaviour of magical childhood.¹¹ By focalising the child consumers as the autonomous circulators of these cards, Rowling suggests that the primary value of such objects is a social one. Collectibles create consumer desire among children in modern neoliberal societies by insisting that their primary value is a social one (Martens, *Consume*). In *Harry Potter*, this social value is portrayed as the chief motivator behind the voluntary participation of children in their collection and exchange. By thus portraying her child characters as active ‘collaborators’ (Gubar 27) in the Chocolate Frog card game, Rowling conceals the underlying fact that the objects require economic ability to purchase. What is actually repeated, sustained economic action is sublimated in the aesthetic image (Iser 106-116) of everyday social activity, transmitting to the reader this pattern of collection as divorced from financial considerations.

¹¹ Child characters exchanging and collecting chocolate cards is a frequently depicted scene in Rowling’s texts, from the exchange of cards on a school trip to Hogsmeade village (*Goblet* 281), to a Christmas party at the Weasleys’ house (*Phoenix* 408), to Halloween dinner at school (*Azkaban* 177) and the way back from school on the train (*Phoenix* 589). The frequent narrative crystallisation of festivals and social rituals around the exchange of cards, complemented by the lack of any overt mention of money in acquiring them, succeeds in portraying this practice as a naturalised, everyday aspect of social life.

The centrality of collection in framing social rituals and individual social identity is informed by the neoliberal ideology, where ‘brands have become an inseparable part of children’s maturing consciousness’ (Hamilton, “Capitalism” 6). This collection as a form of asserting one’s social identity is not, however, restricted to the human children in Rowling’s books. Dobby the house-elf asserts his identity through the collection and wearing of a large collection of clothes. In the second book, it is revealed that house-elves are not allowed to wear clothes, and can only be set free from servitude by being given clothing articles (Rowling, *Chamber* 19). After Dobby is freed, he chooses to publicly assert his unique identity as a free elf by wearing as many clothing articles as possible. When Harry first meets him as a free elf, Dobby wears ‘a tea cozy for a hat, on which he had pinned a number of bright badges, a tie patterned with horseshoes over a bare chest, a pair of what looked like children’s soccer shorts, and odd socks’ (*Goblet* 375-376). He reveals that he constantly collects new clothes, claiming that he ‘is going to buy a sweater next’ (382). The social rationale behind Dobby’s purchase of new clothes is governed by his personal desire to display his freedom. Wizards regularly refuse to view house-elves as intelligent creatures in their own rights (Kellner, “Ambivalence” 371). As this refusal takes the form of the denial of clothes, Dobby’s effort to assert his identity also crystallises around the purchase and collection of clothes as markers of a social status forbidden to his kind, and his display of these articles by wearing them imparts them with tangible sign value. The elf’s collection is thus depicted as a rational motivation to display a new social identity for himself. His economic rationality is further emphasised when, later in the book, he tells Harry that he now sews his own socks, using his wages to buy wool

(Rowling, *Goblet* 433). This economically sound decision is embedded in Dobby's identity as primarily social, which he asserts through his collection of clothes.

This collection of clothes may come across as irrational hoarding to the child characters, but from Dobby's sub-human, subaltern perspective, it has considerable significance. By wearing the forbidden clothes of humans, the elf's 'natural' masters, Dobby makes a social gesture to elevate himself above the stature his species allows. In postcolonial scholarship, this mimicry of the master's sartorial or cultural choices can be understood as an example of a 'discriminatory identity effect' called hybridity (Bhabha 112). This phenomenon involves a 'reevaluation of... fetishist patterns of identification through unauthorised, repeated performances of colonial representations by the colonised' (Ginsberg, "Hybridity" 242). While socks have little value to his human acquaintances like Harry or Ron, Dobby's appropriation of the masters' clothes leads to their reevaluation for him. The rationale behind Dobby's collection of clothes, therefore, is justified by the immense sign value socks hold for him in his attempt to resist his subaltern status.¹²

There is thus a rationale behind these two patterns of collection exhibited by Rowling's characters, and these patterns are thus portrayed as socially accepted features of magical life. To reinforce the social legitimacy of those who collect rationally, Rowling offers foil characters who are eccentric in their

¹² This same value which socks and other clothes hold for Dobby also paradoxically fix him in a perpetually subservient position to human wizards. Because there is a considerable difference in how much Harry values clothes and how much they mean to the elf, this creates the social disparity within which Harry can exercise his philanthropy (Rowling, *Goblet* 177). While gifting a piece of clothing means very little to him, either economically or socially, his minimal effort lets him claim an immense authority over Dobby, even earning a loyalty which the elf maintains till his death (*Hallows* 433). See Section 3.3.

collection of items. Mr. Weasley, who is obsessed with muggle cultures, has a large collection of electrical appliances (Rowling, *Chamber* 49). Magic, however, is a knowledge-system superior to non-magical technology, symbolising a mode of life which runs ‘deeper than the reach of technology’ (O’Har 864). Mr. Weasley’s collection of appliances therefore serves no social purpose in wizardly society which harnesses magic to sustain itself. As a result, Rowling depicts his behaviour as eccentric, if harmless.

“They run off eckeltricity, do they?” he said knowledgeably. “Ah yes, I can see the plugs. I collect plugs,” he added to Uncle Vernon. “And batteries. Got a very large collection of batteries. My wife thinks I’m mad, but there you are.”

Uncle Vernon clearly thought Mr. Weasley was mad too. He moved ever so slightly to the right, screening Aunt Petunia from view, as though he thought Mr. Weasley might suddenly run at them and attack (*Goblet* 46).

The reference to Mr. Weasley’s possible madness concerning his collection serves to differentiate rational collection for social purposes from hoarding. Modern psychology contends that ‘hoarding disorder contrasts with normative collecting behaviour’ (APA, “Diagnostic” 248). Marking those who are ‘unable to part with a variety of useless and valueless objects’ as ‘neurotic’ (Melamed et al. 400) is part of the ideological demarcation of ‘normative’ society from its outsiders in terms of those who refuse to follow the accepted social rationale (Foucault, *Madness* 126-134). While Mr. Weasley is certainly not portrayed as actually mad in the books, his deviance from the normative collecting behaviour sanctioned by society marks him as eccentric. It is important to note that the rationale which demarcates collection from hoarding is not an objective one, but socially determined. While objectively, a collection

of functioning plugs and batteries have more practical use-value than Chocolate Frog cards, what marks Mr. Weasley as irrational is the absence of wizardly social acceptance.¹³ Since wizardly society has no use for muggle technology, it is the dominant ideology of the magical world which judges his collection as unworthy. Social, and not economic, rationale is the deciding factor in legitimising patterns of collection. As Scott Herring argues, society and dominant culture ‘continue to play a vital yet woeful role in defining what may or may not count for material life’ (*Hoarders* 56).

The lack of social rationale in Mr. Weasley’s hoarding social status among other wizards who group him with ‘freaks... who love muggle stuff’ (Rowling, *Prince* 77). Similarly, Xenophilius Lovegood and his daughter Luna are also considered slightly insane by the other characters because of their collection of useless items they mistakenly believe to be valuable. Described as ‘a most eccentric-looking wizard’ (*Hallows* 74), Xenophilius is portrayed as far more neurotic than Mr. Weasley for his hoarding habit. His social status is diminished significantly by his ignorant beliefs in conspiracy theories, and he is largely depicted as a laughingstock during his first introduction (74-79). Because the man is ignorant of what imparts social value and what does not, his collection pattern is deemed erratic and therefore irrational. This inability to collect items rationally is made visible when he clashes with Hermione, one of

¹³ This is further evidenced in the fact that the few times Mr. Weasley’s collection is put to good use, it is because they had been elevated from mere muggle objects to semi-magical ones. When he enchants a Ford Anglia car to enable it to fly, as well as turn invisible, it serves a productive purpose of getting Harry and Ron to school, albeit with a disastrous accident at the end (Rowling, *Chamber* 41-52). Later it appears in the Forbidden Forest to save the two boys from a group of spiders (133). Similarly, Mr. Weasley’s know-how with muggle vehicles comes in handy when he repairs and enchants Sirius’ flying motorbike. It is on this vehicle that Hagrid and Harry make their close escape from Voldemort and his forces (*Hallows* 32-45). The ‘value’ imparted to his eccentric collection of muggle objects is thus contingent upon their elevation to at least some degree of magical function, and consequently acknowledgement from his magical society.

the most reliable voices of rationality in the texts, regarding an object she spots in his room.

“Mr Lovegood – what’s that?”

She was pointing at an enormous, grey spiral horn, not unlike that of a unicorn, which had been mounted on the wall, protruding several feet into the room.

“It is the horn of a Crumple-Horned Snorkack,” said Xenophilius...

“No it isn’t!” said Hermione... “it’s an Erumpent horn! It’s a Class B Tradeable Material and it’s an extraordinarily dangerous thing to have in a house!”

“I bought it,” said Xenophilius dogmatically, “two weeks ago, from a delightful young wizard who knew of my interest in the exquisite Snorkack” (196-197).

In contrast to the collection of Chocolate Frog cards and clothes which hold sign value, Xenophilius’ collection is devoid of any value. When Hermione’s misgivings prove to be true, and the horn is responsible for an explosion which destroys the Lovegood house (206), it is made apparent that the young wizard who had sold Xenophilius the item had defrauded him, capitalising on his ignorance itself. Along with Mr. Weasley, he provides a foil to the rational collecting behaviour Rowling portrays as a legitimate mode of social life. The narrative highlights the necessity of a rationale, regulated by social principles and practices, for successful patterns of collection. The explosion, and the destruction of his house, suggest the dangers of hoarding without any knowledge of the objects in question. While Mr. Weasley is merely considered eccentric, Lovegood in this episode proves to be pointedly irresponsible. This necessity for a rationale behind collection is a feature of the neoliberal championing of the *homo economicus*, where ‘individuals typed as

hoarders disturb not only the idea of the collection or the activity of normal collecting but also the concept of the normative collectible' (Herring, *Hoarders* 53). Rowling's socially accepted normative collectibles are portrayed to be items which individual wizards use primarily to achieve tangible social results.

This rationale, and its concealment of the economic self-interest driving it, succeed through the narrative focus on individuals actively collecting and using commodities to build social relationships and identities. This strategy configures economic activity as discernibly social behaviour, absolving the market responsible for 'the thick fog of commercial messages' targeted at young consumers, a fog which 'conditions their understanding of the world and themselves' (Hamilton, "Capitalism" 6). The rationale, however, governs not only the collection of everyday objects, but permeates the accumulation of more abstract objects. In each of the cases I analyse as evidence in the following section, the importance of self-interest as the motivator for collection can be demonstrated.

3.1.2 Collecting Non-Commodities: Historical artefacts, Memories, and Allegiance

Configuring collection as a form of social behaviour allows Rowling to portray the economic rationale of autonomy in her books, without actually having to depict activity as money-driven. In neoliberal governmentality, the dominant rationale is centrally dependent on the idea of individual self-interest. In the previous section, I demonstrated how the collection of cards by the children and clothes by Dobby were celebrated as rational decisions, as they impart exchange and sign value respectively. In this section, I shall analyse three patterns of collection which do not involve everyday objects, but nevertheless impart value

and are hence portrayed by Rowling as rational aspects of the narrative. These include Voldemort's collection of historically important objects as trophies, Harry and Dumbledore's collection of memories, and Slughorn's collection of influential students for his coterie. Respectively, these patterns of collection depend on symbolic, functional, and exchange value of what is collected. As I demonstrate, with regards to all three forms of value, the collecting patterns are governed by a rationale of self-interest which expresses itself through social, not economic, behaviour.

Rowling depicts Voldemort as an antagonist who, above everything else, is concerned with establishing absolute authority. He detaches himself from the circumstances of his history, as by 'rejecting the birth-name his mother gave him and substituting Voldemort, he believes he is ruling his own destiny' (Croft, "Evil" 158). His self-interest, therefore, can be understood as a quest to symbolically assert his authority on the history of his magical society. Throughout the sixth book, it is gradually revealed that he collects objects of historical importance, before preserving a part of his soul inside them. These objects, called Horcruxes, make it impossible to kill him without first destroying each individual one of them (Rowling, *Prince* 326-331). In the final book, they appear as plot-coupons which Harry must collect before he can finally defeat his nemesis. It is Voldemort's choice of the items he collects, however, that demonstrates his personal obsession with heritage and history. Even before they are transformed into Horcruxes, these objects have great symbolic value, thus making Voldemort's collection of them a quest unto itself. Rowling explains Voldemort's rationale through a conversation Harry has with Dumbledore.

“And they could be anything?” said Harry. “They could be oh, in tin cans or, I dunno, empty potion bottles...”

“You are thinking of Portkeys, Harry, which must be ordinary objects, easy to overlook. But would Lord Voldemort use tin cans or old potion bottles to guard his own precious soul? You are forgetting what I have showed you. Lord Voldemort liked to collect trophies, and he preferred objects with a powerful magical history. His pride, his belief in his own superiority, his determination to carve for himself a startling place in magical history; these things, suggest to me that Voldemort would have chosen his Horcruxes with some care, favoring objects worthy of the honor” (Rowling, *Prince* 332).

Voldemort’s collection of historically important objects to claim for his own is therefore guided by the symbolic value of these objects. His ‘greedy expression’ and ‘the red gleam in his dark eyes’ portrays his desire for such objects, and this greed only expresses itself when he is informed about the status of the objects he is witnessing as belonging to historically important magic-users (287). Over the course of the sixth book, he is revealed to have murdered several people while still a school student, to claim such objects for himself. This need to collect objects of symbolic importance is an expression of Voldemort’s self-interest, which is dominated by a quest for totalitarian control.¹⁴ His ambition to claim objects once owned by Hogwarts founders as vessels of his own soul is mirrored in the climactic battle, when he reveals his

¹⁴ The objects Voldemort collects have symbolic value in the magical world, insofar as they represent the tradition, legacy, and authority of the figures who owned or used them. The symbolic value of an artefact owned by socially or politically powerful figures like Salazar Slytherin or Helga Hufflepuff serves as a ‘cultural indicator’ which reflects ‘the values and attitudes of the authors and of their cultural group’ (Moerk 455). Voldemort’s quest to claim these artefacts can be understood as a desire to reclaim these objects from the influence of their authors, and assert his narcissistic, totalitarian control over them in a symbolic act of rewriting history.

plan to abolish all Hogwarts houses, and establish his ancestor Slytherin's flag as the only one to offer allegiance to (*Hallows* 512). His quest is thus to transform the existing world into one of his own making, and his threat must be resisted in terms of restoring and preserving the existing history of the land (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 3). While collecting the cup of Helga Hufflepuff or the diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw would not serve to actually destroy the legacy of these historical figures, Voldemort's collection asserts a symbolic authority over figures who signify magical history.

Further, his tendency to collect objects which are of symbolic value to him is foreshadowed in his childhood behaviour, when he liked to 'collect trophies' from other children he had victimised or tortured (Rowling, *Prince* 181). This habit of keeping trophies from early victims of his magic is also guided by the symbolic value these objects hold for him. Rowling portrays his behaviour as analogous to those of serial killers who preserve trophies from their crimes, as a psychological need for a material locus to commemorate what they perceive as personal triumphs (Hickey, *Victims*). This need is guided exclusively by a narcissistic self-interest, which seeks to establish individual identity on objects once owned by others, but now representatives of his own power (and mostly, his violence). The social rationale behind Voldemort's self-interest is therefore to dominate and subject the collective society to his personal, totalising authority. The value these objects have for him are symbolic. By inscribing a historical object with his own personality, Voldemort 'preserves the genealogy' of the collection, but 'ultimately asserts his own authority' on it

(Hilsdale 178). Symbolically, Voldemort arrests the genealogy of the object and subsumes it within his personal identity as dictator.¹⁵

Another pattern of collection which progresses parallel to Voldemort's quest for symbolic objects is Harry and Dumbledores' accumulation of memories. Memories in the books are described as sensory experiences where an individual can access and observe events that have happened in the past. They function like visions in quest fantasies, which are 'apparitions or seemings that are perceived only by the chosen recipient' (Clute and Grant 987). Rowling portrays that these visions are not simply perceived, but are actively collected as objects, governed by a rationale which recognises the functional value of such collectibles. While Harry is initially skeptical about this value, Dumbledore insists that the journey 'together through the murky marshes of memory into the thickets of wildest guesswork' (Rowling, *Prince* 129) is essential if Harry is to learn more about Voldemort. Dumbledore's interpretative voice, coupled with the observation of memories, thus gradually downloads information for Harry until Voldemort's real intentions are revealed. 'In the hierarchy of quest fantasy,' argues Mendlesohn, "... information given by a guide is very reliable, and visions generally unchallenged; because the vision is buried in the learning

¹⁵ Voldemort's acts of claiming these artefacts, and tainting them with his evil magic, are representative of the trope of 'desecration' commonly committed by dark lord figures in fantasy (Clute and Grant 405). By analysing his obsession in terms of symbolic value, and their importance to a totalising narcissist, I argue that this trope of fantasy provides a very compatible metaphor for the politically and ideologically motivated tendency of Voldemort as an authoritarian dictator. This behaviour is precisely why he represents a great threat to the magical world in Rowling's books, as a neoliberal governmentality needs to allow the symbolic value of artefacts like the Sword of Gryffindor to continually circulate, passing from the original owner to multiple descendants magically (Rowling, *Chamber* 188; *Hallows* 522). Such circulation ensures the sustenance of an impersonal, magical hegemony, while Voldemort's claiming of the artefacts would destroy their symbolic value, and make visible the authoritarian figure of the sovereign.

process” (*Rhetorics* 44).¹⁶ What makes the memories function as visions as well as plot coupons is that they are collected as semi-tangible objects from their original owners. Dumbledore’s collection of the memories is a painstaking process of investigation and magical manipulation. This is evidenced in the case of Morfin the wizard, whose memory has been tampered with by Voldemort.

“It took a great deal of skilled Legilimency to coax it out of him,” said Dumbledore, “...However, I was able to secure a visit to Morfin in the last weeks of his life, by which time I was attempting to discover as much as I could about Voldemort’s past. I extracted this memory with difficulty” (Rowling, *Prince* 241).

Memories function here as hard-earned collectibles, and serve as material loci in the narrative for the revelation of truth. The rationale behind their collection is, again, governed by Harry’s self-interest in their use-value. Without collecting these memories, and consequently discovering the true intentions of Voldemort, he would be significantly weaker against his enemy. Unlike the horcruxes, memories have functional value; when extracted, they are depicted as a translucent substance, which must be poured into the magical device called a Pensieve to access visions of the past (220). Although most of the memories are collected by Dumbledore and offered to Harry, the protagonist is then charged with a quest to collect one last crucial unit of memory from Professor Slughorn (243). The memory, therefore, while ultimately serving as a vision which reveals information, also functions as a plot-coupon he has to

¹⁶ The fantastic mode, through the image of the Pensieve, downloads information for Harry with first-hand clarity. In modal models of memory, ‘external events and information are perceived or experienced by the senses and reside in great detail and richness, yet only very briefly’ (Sutton et al. 212). By literalising pieces of memory into semi-tangible objects, Rowling allows the direct use of memories in their fully preserved detail and richness, thus transforming them into objects of use value.

acquire. Harry's subsequent elaborate plan to acquire the memory only succeeds when he finally convinces Slughorn that his memory has value, and to collect it would be in Harry's self-interest to stay alive. First alluding to his mother, who was Slughorn's favourite student, he admonishes him by saying that 'she gave her life for me, but you won't give me a memory' (322).¹⁷ When Slughorn is sufficiently guilty, he promises him that 'you'd cancel out anything you did by giving me the memory... it would be a brave and noble thing to do' (323). The transaction is thus based on Harry's pursuit of his self-interest, and Slughorn's acknowledgment of the functional value of his memory. Through this pattern of collection, aided by Dumbledore, Harry uses the functional value of the memories he collects to journey from ignorance to discovery. It is a journey which ultimately allows him to overcome great odds and triumph over evil once and for all (Rowling, *Hallows* 533).

Harry's access to Slughorn is itself dependent on a reciprocal pattern of collection; Slughorn is also interested in collecting Harry as a member of his immediate social circle. Early in the text, Dumbledore explains to Harry that the old Potions master has a habit of surrounding himself with elite individuals. This behaviour is guided by a self-interest which manifests itself exclusively in social terms of prestige and status.

"Horace," said Dumbledore, relieving Harry of the responsibility to say any of this, "likes his comfort. He also likes the company of the famous, the successful, and the powerful... He used to handpick

¹⁷ Harry's collection of this memory as plot coupon exhibits his growing social skills, as well. He successfully gets Slughorn inebriated, then cashes in on the subject of his mother's sacrifice, which continues to be a sacred token of collective memory in the wizarding world (Mauk 123-142). Slughorn's increased investment in Lily's memory, as his favourite student, successfully manipulates him into compliance.

favorites at Hogwarts, sometimes for their ambition or their brains, sometimes for their charm or their talent, and he had an uncanny knack for choosing those who would go on to become outstanding in their various fields. Horace formed a kind of club of his favorites with himself at the center, making introductions, forging useful contacts between members, and always reaping some kind of benefit in return, whether a free box of his favorite crystallized pineapple or the chance to recommend the next junior member of the Goblin liaison Office.”

Harry had a sudden and vivid mental image of a great swollen spider, spinning a web around it, twitching a thread here and there to bring its large and juicy flies a little closer (Rowling, *Prince* 49).

Slughorn’s collection of important and talented companions is driven by an acknowledgment not only of their symbolic value in terms of social status, but the potential exchange value they hold for him. By keeping them in his social milieu, he reaps specific benefits later. He overtly describes to Harry a list of his students who have gone on to be successful, and who he can now approach to receive benefits like free Quidditch tickets or chocolate hampers for his birthday (47). This mode of self-interest is targeted towards a desired increase in personal social capital. Bram Lancee argues that social capital ‘implies that people better equipped with social resources, in the sense of their social network and the resources of others they can call upon, better succeed in attaining their goals’ (17) Although these resources are portrayed as voluntary gifts given to Slughorn by his ex-students, his reception of these gifts is guaranteed by a prior investment which is distinctly economic, if not in form then at least in rationale. Self-interest dictates that ‘people will invest in

relationships in view of the prospective value of the resources made available by these relations' (17). Social capital therefore has a distinct exchange value. The veteran professor's investment in collecting promising students, therefore, is an economically motivated one. It is the 'lapse in time' (Baudrillard 171) between his initial investment and the ultimate returns that conceals his collection beneath a veneer of purely social interaction.¹⁸

There are two aspects to gift-giving which frame Slughorn's collection of students as a social, rather than an economic, transaction. Firstly, 'the masking and misrecognition allowed by the separation in time' (Venkatesan 52) between Slughorn's investment and reception of resources, as demonstrated in the previous paragraph. The second strategy is the 'systematic emphasis on the symbolic aspects of the activities' (52) which Slughorn performs with his social circle, which are always focused on interpersonal behaviour rather than transaction. If Slughorn makes an investment by collecting students, then his currency is not money but social behaviour and public admiration. This is evidenced in an episode where his behaviour towards a member of his circle changes immediately as he finds out there is no longer any social incentive to keep him around.

¹⁸ Having an exchange value, social capital is reciprocal and can be cashed in for returns. Laura Solomon posits that 'knowing that social capital should only be spent when necessary,' rational individuals 'ration it for only critical purposes,' in the same way as actual financial wealth ("Social" 37). Harry imbibes this lesson. While initially avoiding going to Slughorn's social parties, finding them tedious (Rowling, *Prince* 177), he realises that attending parties is his way to accumulate social favour with the professor, which would help him on his quest to acquire the priceless memory about Voldemort (252). He eventually 'cashes in' his capital at a drunken funeral party with Slughorn and Hagrid, and succeeds in getting the memory in return (344). At no point in this transaction is any actual money involved, yet the entire process is driven by an economic rationale of self-interest, investment, and opportunistic spending. It is the social framing of Harry's plan which resists the economic rationale from becoming visible in the narrative.

“I was just telling young Marcus here that I had the pleasure of teaching his Uncle Damocles,” Slughorn told Harry and Neville, now passing around a basket of rolls. “Outstanding wizard, outstanding, and his Order of Merlin most well-deserved. Do you see much of your uncle, Marcus?”

...“Not...not much of him, no... he and my dad don’t get on very well, you see, so I don’t really know much about...”

His voice tailed away as Slughorn gave him a cold smile and turned to McLaggen instead... offering around a small tray of pies; somehow, Belby was missed out (Rowling, *Prince* 93-94).

Slughorn uses social behaviour as currency, as evidenced here by his reluctance to use any for Belby because he presents no social value without his contact to his famous uncle.¹⁹ Harry correctly deduces that in Slughorn’s circle, ‘everyone here seemed to have been invited because they were connected to somebody well-known or influential’ (94). By collecting and acknowledging students, he also raises their social prestige, as evidenced in Ron’s increasing disappointment because Slughorn repeatedly refuses to invite him to parties where Harry and Hermione are made welcome (135). His resentment derives largely from the feeling of being socially left-out, as he desires higher social prestige through acknowledgment from the potions master. Among the three

¹⁹ It is important to note that this social capital’s exchange value occasionally extends to tangible monetary returns. If social behaviour as a currency had absolutely no relation with economic benefit, it would not have been governed by the rationale of self-interest. ‘Once social capital is deconstructed into what it is... it can be seen that ‘what it is’ is conceptually weak’ (Robison et al. 4), and its exchange value is considered considerable because it has some overlap with actual market profit, albeit indirectly. This is evidenced in the books when Hagrid’s old pet, Aragog the acromantula dies (Rowling, *Prince* 400). Knowing how valuable the venom of the beast is, Slughorn uses his social behaviour to charm Hagrid, and while offering an ostensibly heartfelt farewell speech at the spider’s funeral, he surreptitiously milks some of the venom to later sell for good money (411). This episode is witnessed by Harry, who comments to himself that Slughorn ‘must have got a good amount of venom’ considering how smug he sounded during his speech (411-412). This exchange value makes social behaviour a considerably effective currency in this episode.

patterns of collection analysed in this section, Slughorn's behaviour reveals the most intimate connection between self-interest and social identity constructed by Rowling. Slughorn is acutely aware that prestige is 'a social fact of universal importance,' and 'those who possess it have a marked ascendancy over their fellows' (Carlton, "Prestige" 169-170). This awareness allows him to use it as currency to influence talented young wizards to join his collection. His collecting behaviour, therefore, is governed by his self-interest to be a kingmaker, as 'he has never wanted to occupy the throne himself, he prefers the backseat' (Rowling, *Prince* 49). By locating himself at the centre of a social milieu of successful people, Slughorn's rationale drives him to maximise the social influence he can have over the wizarding community.

From the analyses of these different patterns of collection, it is evident that regardless of what form of value collectibles possess, Rowling's rational characters always pursue collection out of self-interest. All three sets of collectors exercise their autonomy in the social register; Voldemort to totalise symbolic control over society, Harry and Dumbledore to recover information and use it to generate hitherto hidden knowledge, and Slughorn to establish influence and reap possible rewards in exchange for social capital. The final pattern of collection I analyse is used by Rowling to portray the school culture at Hogwarts as fundamentally a social tournament. House points are dispensed by teachers and collected by students, and become the tokens of currency around which school social behaviour is regulated. The rationale behind this points system is subtly constructed by the house competition organised by the school,

which promotes social rivalry among student communities.²⁰ Transforming school life into this tournament of values, as I demonstrate, helps Rowling forward the assumption that social and moral values, not economic ones, are the real functional units of wizardly life.

3.1.3 House Points: Towards a Tournament of Values at Hogwarts

The Hogwarts house points are portrayed by Rowling as the traditionally structured currency of life as a student wizard. Unlike the other collectibles analysed so far, the collection and loss of house points are not limited to activities of specific characters. Instead, it comprises an entire cultural convention; all students at Hogwarts are obliged to participate in this collection. I argue that Rowling uses the points system to portray the relations the students form with each other as primarily based on social approval and social status.²¹ She depicts the rewarding and confiscation of points as entirely dependent on the social relations between student wizards, as well as their teachers. The effects of this strategy can be analysed by interpreting this house points competition as a tournament of values. According to Appadurai,

Tournaments of values are complex, periodic events that are *removed in some culturally well-defined way* from the routines of *economic life*. Participation in them is likely to be both a *privilege of those in power* and an *instrument of status contests* between them...what is at issue in such tournaments is not just

²⁰ Promoting competition as the primary mode of action is integral to the functioning of Hogwarts as a neoliberal ISA. See Chapter 1.

²¹ As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Rowling builds on the school story tradition, where games ‘served the important function of strengthening the body’ (Winn 70). She does not restrict competition solely to periodic games and contests, but makes competition the central mode of social interaction by transforming the game into a constant, yearlong process of surveillance and judgment of students. As I shall demonstrate here, the house point system organises this never-ending competition into a tournament of value, safely insulated from any visible economic influence.

status, rank, fame, or reputation of actors, but the *disposition of the central tokens of value* of the society in question.” (“Introduction” 21, italics mine)

In such a tournament, the perception of value is displaced from its economic register onto ‘social, symbolic, and creative values.’ The circulation of house points as currency, which imparts these forms of value, ‘can only exist and operate effectively within [the] web of social relations’ (Moeran, “Tournament” 149). Rowling conceals the economic rationale of self-interest behind autonomy in her hierarchical world, by highlighting social relations as the most important form of engagement at Hogwarts. Behaviour among child characters as social, rather than economic, is efficiently portrayed as voluntary, and the house point system facilitates this portrayal.

Child characters are made aware of the implications of the house point system at the beginning of their school life. The school presents itself as a space within which students will compete with each other. At the same time, it is suggested that this rivalry will be dominated by a sense of community and fellow-feeling, rather than aggressive selfishness. The children are told that at Hogwarts, ‘your triumphs will earn you house points, while any rule-breaking will lose you house points’ (Rowling, *Stone* 107). This information is supplemented by the positive reinforcement that ‘your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts,’ and the knowledge that winning the house competition is a great honour (107). This framing sets the house points system apart from purely competitive tournaments. Instead, this system is structured as a tournament of values, where students will be participants in ‘competition of the aristocratic sort which seals their parity... and thus their collective caste privilege’ (Baudrillard 117). The house competition is framed within the more general inclusion of

students into the magical school itself. As the site of the tournament of values, Hogwarts is depicted as ‘an embodied space of practice where visibility and mutual recognition lead to a sense of belonging’ (Moeran, “Tournament” 150) Entwistle and Rocamora 743, 749).²² To portray this optimistic sense of belonging at the heart of competition, Rowling uses the Slytherins as an undesirable, foil group of stereotypically arrogant students. They serve as a common enemy in the books to portray collective unity among the child characters belonging to the three ‘good’ houses. This is evidenced in the celebration of the failure of Slytherin, at the end of the first book.

Someone standing outside the Great Hall might well have thought some sort of explosion had taken place, so loud was the noise that erupted from the Gryffindor table... Harry, still cheering, nudged Ron in the ribs and pointed at Malfoy, who couldn’t have looked more stunned and horrified if he’d just had the Body-Bind Curse put on him.

“Which means,” Dumbledore called over the storm of applause, for even Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were celebrating the downfall of Slytherin, “we need a little change of decoration.”

He clapped his hands. In an instant, the green hangings became scarlet and the silver became gold; the huge Slytherin serpent vanished and a towering Gryffindor lion took its place (Rowling, *Stone* 280).

²² This construction facilitates the portrayal of competition as voluntary and insulated. Since the house points system is a closed circuit, and has no value outside annual school life at Hogwarts, there is a spatially and temporally regulated safe space, within which all competition can take place. Tournaments of value depend integrally on these specialised spaces to ensure that competition results in an ultimate increase of mutual social relations, rather than risk any weakening of the same through economic incentivisation (Entwistle and Rocamora 743, 749). Unlike the points system, money could be exchanged anywhere, and would have rendered it impossible to regulate the competition with disciplinary efficiency.

Dumbledore's last-minute rewarding of house points to Harry and his friends, regardless of whether they deserved them or not (279-280), is a necessary *deus ex-machina* employed to reinforce the sense of community which a tournament of values requires. The elaborate gesture of allowing Slytherin colours to decorate the hall, then cruelly denying the children their victory, is a spectacle employed by Rowling to portray the Gryffindors, Ravenclaws, and Hufflepuffs coming together. This construction goes on to repeat itself throughout the series, as these three houses frequently unite against morally evil characters, and Slytherins are usually opposed to them (*Phoenix* 322-327; *Hallows* 288-319). House points, and their successful competitive collection, is thus framed within an acknowledgment of all the participants' membership to the same elite space (Smith, *Auctions* 51). The Slytherins never quite belong to this space, and are made to exist as a permanent foil who serve to reinforce the unity and community of the three good houses.

This unity is framed in terms of social relationships and behaviour. Brian Moeran identifies 'the cementing of social relations as a crucial function' (149) of the tournament of values. Such a framing can be understood in terms of the anthropological perception of value; it derives not from pure economic concerns, but when a specific society collectively acknowledges something to be worthwhile in their lives (Graeber 3).²³ Rowling portrays a culture at

²³ Rowling derives this theme of collectively agreed upon value from the school story tradition, as well as the structure of the wainscot fantasy (Clute and Grant 734), where the elite magical society functions as a 'folk group' (Lacoss 56). The traditional value of christian friendship, where the importance of young men in public schools forming homelike communities is paramount to their spiritual development, is drawn upon to characterise the house system (Puccio 57-74). Similarly, the functioning of the secret magical community as a folk group necessitates their collectively agreeing upon certain symbolic rituals which value is imparted to as a representation of wizardly identity (Lacoss 53-77). Both these traditions of children's literature come together in Rowling's books and help her portray the house point system as something of innate collective value to the Hogwarts community.

Hogwarts where children collect house points because their value derives from social status among peers. When Harry and his friends lose a hundred and fifty points for a serious breach of school rules, the reaction of the other children make it clear that the currency they have lost is predominantly social.

Harry Potter, the famous Harry Potter, their hero of two Quidditch matches, had lost them all those points, him and a couple of other stupid first years.

From being one of the most popular and admired people at the school, Harry was suddenly the most hated. Even Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs turned on him, because everyone had been longing to see Slytherin lose the House Cup.

Everywhere Harry went, people pointed and didn't trouble to lower their voices as they insulted him. Slytherins, on the other hand, clapped as he walked past them, whistling and cheering, "Thanks Potter, we owe you one" (Rowling, *Stone* 226).

This episode, and Harry's subsequent determination to win back the trust of his peers by collecting more house points, establishes social relations as the motivator of collection. Clyde Kluckhohn, in his anthropological analysis of how societies conceive of values, contends that what societies deem as desirable is integrally linked to the patterns of social behaviour they exhibit (395). At Hogwarts, the students' behaviour is regulated by the desire for social status and acceptance, and this status is crystallised in the desire to triumph in the house tournament. House points are the specialised 'currency of such tournaments,' and are 'set apart through well understood cultural diacritics' (Appadurai, "Introduction" 21). It is Hogwarts school culture, and the specific tradition of the house system it espouses, which imparts value to points. Collection of these

points, therefore, is a social model of behaviour contingent upon the competitive structure Hogwarts offers its students as a playing field.²⁴

The collection of points is of course dependent on the teachers, who are the arbiters of social propriety, and reward and punish students as they deem fit. However, the teachers do not represent an objective, visible source of authority, but are as hegemonically organised as the students. Different teachers allow students to collect points based on their own prejudices and preferences. Professor Snape is established as a member of the Slytherin community unfairly opposed to non-Slytherin students. While he confiscates fifty points from Ron for throwing a 'large, slippery crocodile heart at Malfoy' in class, he pointedly ignores Malfoy's provocations which led up to this confrontation (Rowling, *Azkaban* 98). As a teacher, he makes no effort to hide his pleasure at taking points from Harry, and overtly admits that his resistance to Harry's collection of points is governed by a desire to see him fail at the house tournament. This is evidenced in the sixth book, where Snape catches Harry using a dangerous spell on Malfoy.

"Well, we shall see how you feel after your detentions," said Snape. "Ten o'clock Saturday morning, Potter. My office."

²⁴ Use and misuse of the house point system is also important in establishing negative social relations among rivals. When Malfoy and his peers temporarily gain a corrupt juridical power from Umbridge, they dock points from Harry and his friends for deeply unfair reasons including Malfoy's dislike for Harry, Ron's untidy shirt, and Hermione's non-magical heritage (Rowling, *Phoenix* 326). This episode evidences, as with Harry's social embarrassment at losing points for Gryffindor, that the competition is not based on objective behaviour, but the social relations an individual forms during their term at school. Regulating behaviour through competitive relations between individual subjects, rather than by the authority of a single visible sovereign, is the most efficient governmental strategy for the production of docile bodies, who consequently act as hegemonic subjects (Foucault, *Discipline* 77).

“But sir...” said Harry, looking up desperately. “Quidditch...the last match of the...”

“Ten o’clock,” whispered Snape, with a smile that showed his yellow teeth.

“Poor Gryffindor...fourth place this year, I fear...” (*Prince* 347).

In this episode, Snape’s rationale behind punishing Harry is not guided solely by an objective judgment of the latter’s breaking of school rules. He is equally guided by the implications this punishment will have on Gryffindor house; he deliberately sets the time of Harry’s detention to clash with the quidditch final, which Harry will now be unable to play and win points. House points thus become the currency of Snape’s personal interaction with Harry, as he firmly establishes himself as a social rival. As with rivalries, positive social relations are also formed between students and teachers through the awarding and collection of house points. Professor Sprout makes a symbolic gesture of solidarity with Harry, who is being persecuted by the tyrannical Umbridge, by awarding ‘Gryffindor twenty points when Harry passed her a watering can’ (582). Her social relationship and alliance to Harry’s cause is cemented through the pattern of dissemination of points as ‘the central tokens of value’ at Hogwarts (Appadurai, “Introduction” 21). The circulation of the house point, therefore, draws upon the rationale of both gifts and barter. Like gifts, collecting them is dependent on a ‘high coding in terms of etiquette and appropriateness, and a tendency to follow socially set paths.’ Etiquette and social behaviour merit the collection of points. At the same time, in terms of gaining points to increase one’s social status, they resemble rationally acquired commodities in ‘the spirit

of calculation [and] an openness to self-interest' exercised in deciding how to win more points (Appadurai, "Introduction" 25).²⁵

The lack of impartiality among teachers like Snape or Sprout portrays the house points as deriving their values from a multiplicity of social relationships, rather than a single authoritative rationale.²⁶ Moeran draws attention to Appadurai's use of the plural term '*values*, since there is no single value held by all the participants' ("Tournament" 149). The house points therefore occupy what Hyde identifies as 'a wise middle ground between gift and commodity.' On one hand, Rowling portrays the autonomy of children, actively pursuing their collection of points out of a 'desire for individual enrichment.' This desire, as demonstrated, is primarily one for social approval. On the other hand, the teachers' prejudice in gifting and confiscating points unfairly demonstrates that the points are equally valuable for them. Who awards points and to whom becomes crucial in the formation of social relations between staff and students. In this capacity, the points address 'the needs of the community' to organise itself and establish relationships of alliance or rivalry (Hyde, *Gift* 81).

The circulation of house points is thus involved in the reproduction and maintenance of social relationships between students and teachers. Appadurai

²⁵ The tournament of values, therefore, maintains a balance between the rationale of self-interest, and the overt depiction of social relations as constitutive of fundamental school community. House points, occupying a 'transformational midpoint between pure gifts and pure commerce...remain devices for reproducing relations between persons,' and facilitate the preservation of a hegemonic, rather than coercive system of competition at Hogwarts (Appadurai, "Introduction" 25).

²⁶ Rowling's refusal to let any one teacher control a single, objective set of rules by which all students are judged allows her to preserve the hegemonic regulation of Hogwarts. A multiplicity of social relations, portrayed in a tournament of values, decentralises authority by locating it in the invisible hand of magic. Umbridge provides a foil to this, when she briefly takes over and unleashes an autocratic authority on the school (Rowling, *Phoenix* 367-456). However, her regime is soon overthrown as tyrannical and coercive, and impersonal hegemony restored (456-457).

argues that in a tournament of values, certain ‘culturally conventionalised paths for the flow of things’ regulate the circulation of the specialised currency (“Introduction” 21). Rowling uses the house system as a cultural convention at Hogwarts to depict her characters as collecting and circulating points according to a rationale of social self-interest. As a tournament of values, the house point system successfully dissociates this rationale from economic or monetary roots, and insists that relations between people at Hogwarts (and in magical life as a whole) function through social engagement. This insistence is a necessary component for the proliferation of the neoliberal ideology of self-interest. By making repetitive and constant collection a common pattern of social behaviour, Rowling demonstrates her characters acting out of self-interest. At the same time, because she displaces these patterns onto social registers, the illusion of this rationale rising organically from the individual common sense of the characters is maintained. Collecting objects for self-interest is depicted as spontaneous and organic social behaviour, while the economic roots of the rationale remain concealed.

Awarding and collecting items to form social relations therefore embeds the economic rationale in a different political economy in Rowling’s wizarding world. As the teachers’ behaviour reveals, items are often awarded as gifts with the express purpose of establishing interpersonal relationships. ‘Gifts bespeak relationships’ (Hyde, *Gift* 69), and it is the transformation of the object exchanged from commodity to gift which successfully conceals economic hierarchies beneath the veneer of a life which is predominantly social (Mauss, *Gift*). Having demonstrated how patterns of collection embed self-interest at the heart of social behaviour in the books, I argue in the next section that Rowling

portrays a gift economy at Hogwarts which dominates these patterns of social behaviour. Gift-giving is depicted as free, disinterested and voluntary, and as such is devoid of any mention of monetary agendas. However, as I demonstrate, Harry's gift-giving, and the gifts he receives, serve distinct purposes of self-interest in establishing his authority and confirming his membership to elite social circles. Gifts, as objects, become the signifiers of Harry's niceness in presenting him as a good samaritan. The following section analyses the gifts given at Hogwarts to argue that being a good samaritan is subtly made dependent on Harry's individual pursuit of self-interest.

3.2. Gift Culture in *Harry Potter*: Gift-Giving, Authority, and Social Bonds

In Chapter 2, I analysed how magical objects are portrayed as commodities for purchase. Here, I argue that while gifts have been considered in some anthropological scholarship to be diametrically opposed to the value-forming Marxian commodity,²⁷ the rationale of gift-giving is also governed by self-interest. In his research into how gift economy functions, Marcel Mauss contends that in European cultures among others, 'exchanges and contracts take place in the form of presents; in theory these are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily' (*Gift* 3). However, gifts are not entirely divorced from structures of reciprocity and social expectation. They serve to conceal these structures more efficiently by insisting upon the centrality of

²⁷ The popular image of the freely given gift, dating back to 6th and 7th century English monarchies, has been pervasive in popular culture. A large number of anthropological scholars have interpreted gifts as pre-dating capitalist markets, and therefore commodities, and thus representing a marginal form of barter economy (Dumont 66-90; Hyde, *Imagination* 144-149; Malinowski 2-19). Others have insisted that the gift evolved as a response to and an alternative for the commodity in the Marxian sense (Gregory, *Gifts* 30-79; Sahlins 170-193; Taussig 66-89).

social, not economic, motivation.²⁸ Bourdieu explains how gift culture achieves this illusion.

If it is true that the *lapse of time interposed* is what enables the gift or counter gift to be seen and experienced as an *inaugural act of generosity*, without any past or future...then it is clear that in reducing the polythetic to the monothetic, objectivism destroys the specificity of all practices which, like gift exchange, tend or pretend to put the *law of self interest into abeyance*... Gift exchange is, if not the only mode of commodity circulation practiced...in societies which, because they deny "the true soil of their life," as Lukacs puts it, have an *economy in itself and not for itself*. (171, italics mine)

Gifts are exchanged in Rowling's books to use this lapse of time, and conceal the economic rationale of gifting. An analysis of the gifts exchanged in the texts demonstrates that these social rewards almost always take the form of concrete and important acquisitions, which help Harry develop his social identity and authority as a wizard. While Harry gives gifts out of an innate niceness, his actions can be analysed as motivated by a self-interested expectation of social returns. Moreover, the existing financial and social hierarchy in Rowling's world provides Harry the chance to demonstrate his moral superiority by giving gifts to his inferiors. Gifts in contemporary societies actually function as 'a sign of a thing, and... it marks only a formal and not a substantive relationship' (Dilnot 53). The formal relationships Harry structures with others, as I demonstrate, preserve the hierarchy that allows him the economic power to give gifts in the first place. Any substantive introspection

²⁸ Economic scholarship has identified this displacement as the source of the popular conception of 'free gifts' (Hart, "Commoditisation" 30-57; Tambiah 88-134).

into why these hierarchies exist is denied through an individualistic and performatively ‘nice’ mode of moral behaviour.

There are three central aspects to a gift culture; its symbolic rituals, its insistence on reciprocity, and its social distinctions. I first demonstrate how the symbolic rituals of gift-giving in the books help establish social relations between the characters which benefit their individual development. There are different categories of gifts received by Harry in the books, but I demonstrate that in each case, these gifts serve to establish him as a member of the magical social order. A gift culture is defined by specific ‘patterns of interaction’ which reinforce the partners who exchange gifts as members of a community, which outsiders are not privy to (Giesler 284).²⁹ I focus on the different gifts received by Harry from peers and guardian figures, and how these patterns of gifting reinforce and confirm his social identity as a wizard. Following this analysis, I focus on the gifts Harry gives to others, and how a rationale of self-interest is embedded in what is depicted as his performative niceness. I argue that his niceness is governed by philanthropic impulses, and his gifting activity secure for him an identity of moral superiority. The hierarchical structure allows Harry to exercise this moral behaviour in the first place, and while his gift-giving secures him social approval, the hierarchy itself remains necessarily unchanged.

3.2.1: Gifts to Harry: Multiple Registers of Social Relations

Harry’s quest is aided and complemented in the books by his periodic reception of gifts from friends and guardian figures. The gifts he receives can be divided

²⁹ These patterns of interaction usually take the form of community formation (Dilnot 67-70). In Rowling’s texts, these usually feature as Harry’s adoption into established social orders, from becoming Sirius’ godson and inheriting his wealth (Rowling, *Prince* 19-21), to being largely adopted by the Weasley family (*Phoenix* 133; *Azkaban* 64).

into three broad categories; plot-vouchers, plot-coupons, and symbolic gifts.³⁰

All three categories establish specific patterns of social relations between Harry and the people who give him gifts. Not only do these gifts help him in his quest against Voldemort, but they serve to fix his status and position within the social community of the wizarding world.

The first category of plot-vouchers are gifts Harry receives exclusively from adult, guardian figures. His use of these gifts is made contingent upon the revelation of more information. Rowling portrays these gifts to establish the authority of guide figures who Harry must trust to understand how the magical world functions. This strategy reinforces the ‘portal-quest fantasies’ denial of argument with the universe’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 17). Unlike plot coupons, plot-vouchers are ‘issued to protagonists... early in their travels, often with an assurance that when the time comes they will realise its use’ (Clute and Grant 768). Transforming plot-vouchers into gifts thus constructs the relationship between the giver and the receiver in terms of an imbalance of maturity. The givers, in their assurance that these items shall reveal their use when the time comes, acknowledge a superior understanding of the world. The receiver, in turn, must trust in the authority of the adult voice if they are to accept the gift.

The most classic example of this category of gifts are the objects Dumbledore leaves Harry, Ron, and Hermione in his will (Rowling, *Hallows* 68). While he leaves Harry a secret message inscribed on ‘the Snitch he caught

³⁰ The pragmatic value of each category differs in its application to Harry’s quest, as I demonstrate here. Plot coupons, collected cumulatively on his journey (Clute and Grant 768), ultimately come together to complete his accumulation of power to overcome great odds. Plot vouchers initially keep their function hidden (768), and reveal important information to Harry at crucial junctures. Symbolic gifts help him acquire social capital (Robison 4), which grant him resources in the form of sustenance and valuable allies. All three registers of gifts help him form social relations with the wizarding community, which ultimately save him from Voldemort.

in his first quidditch match' (68), he leaves no indication about its meaning. It is only at the end of the novel, when the knowledge comes to him almost as a revelation; 'understanding was coming so fast it seemed to have bypassed thought. This was the close. This was the moment' (337). Similarly, Dumbledore's gift to Ron does not make any initial sense to the children (68). However, at a later moment of crisis, it reveals a secret magical function, which is automatically triggered when Ron needs to find his way back to his friends and help them (188). These events depict Dumbledore as a voice of authority, whose knowledge is to be trusted without question. In a conversation between Harry and Ron regarding the plot-vouchers, they come to agree that Dumbledore had a superior intuition and knowledge about his students which even they do not have themselves.

"Yeah, but if Dumbledore was alive, why wouldn't he show himself? Why wouldn't he just hand us the sword?..."

"I dunno," said Ron... "He knew what he was doing when he gave me the Deluminator, didn't he? He – well," Ron's ears turned bright red and he became engrossed in a tuft of grass at his feet, which he prodded with his toe, "he must've known I'd run out on you."

"No," Harry corrected him. "He must've known you'd always want to come back." (192)

Dumbledore's gift to Ron, in this episode, is motivated by the old wizard's deeper knowledge of how magic works. The gift becomes the material locus for the imparting of knowledge. Dumbledore's role as mentor is reinforced in this episode; while 'heroes cannot remain tied to their mentor's apron-

strings,’ (Clute and Grant 637), Dumbledore’s gift ensures that his knowledge still aids them in their mission. The adult gifting of plot-vouchers to child characters is a recognition of the need for adult voices to guide and rationalise the actions of children.³¹ By portraying the plot-voucher as a gift, Rowling sublimates the training of young wizards into a social, personal engagement between student and mentor. The act of gifting is the locus of this sublimation, as it ‘strips away the crudescence that commodity production has interposed between the real work of things and our understanding and consciousness of what it is they do’ (Dilnot 57-58). The real work of things are explained to the children through adult voices.³² The interpersonal engagement between trusting apprentice and wise advisor structures the conservative worldview where knowledge ‘is to be rediscovered rather than generated’ (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 16).

On a different register from plot-vouchers, Harry is also gifted plot coupons by peers and adults. Unlike the vouchers, the functions of these items are made evident to Harry at the moment of reception. These gifts given to him establish positive social relations of alliance and assistance between the giver and the receiver. Gifting objects which the receiver can use productively and develop themselves provides ‘concrete or evident proof that the giver knows, and has understood, recognized, affirmed, and sought to concretely meet the

³¹ This pedagogic form of guidance draws the child into narratives and ideologies created for them by adult, hegemonic authority (Rose, “Impossibility” 58-60). At the same time, Rowling’s depiction of Ron and Harry’s optimistic, voluntary realisation that they are now on their own helps conceal that the path they are travelling has itself been pre-determined by adults like Dumbledore (Rowling, *Hallows* 611).

³² Elsewhere in the books, there are other instances of minor plot-vouchers being given to characters. Hagrid, as a teacher, sends Harry a textbook he will need for his school-year. However, Harry is unable to control the sentient book which ‘snapped shut on his hand and then flapped past him, still scuttling on its covers’ (Rowling, *Azkaban* 8). It is only after Hagrid reveals to him a simple trick to render the book inanimate that he can put the book to educational use (81). Instances like these serve to build a social relationship of mentorship among characters.

other's... needs and desires' (Dilnot 51). When Sirius sends Harry the firebolt in the third book, it becomes instrumental in his triumph on the quidditch pitch (Rowling, *Azkaban* 133). Later he acknowledges that his gifting of the broomstick was inspired by a sense of guilt that he could not be around to protect Harry despite being his godfather. He asks Harry to 'consider it as thirteen birthdays' worth of presents from your godfather' (316). This gifting cements a bond between Harry and Sirius which they continue to develop and cherish till the latter's death (*Phoenix* 512).³³ This social relationship benefits Harry not only in direct terms of being rescued from Death Eaters by Sirius (*Phoenix* 502), but also in terms of his social status. In an episode, he realises this and uses his relationship with Sirius to assert dominance over his abusive uncle.

"Godfather?" sputtered Uncle Vernon. "You haven't got a godfather!"

"Yes, I have," said Harry brightly. "He was my mum and dad's best friend. He's a convicted murderer, but he's broken out of wizard prison and he's on the run. He likes to keep in touch with me, though... keep up with my news... check if I'm happy..."

And, grinning broadly at the look of horror on Uncle Vernon's face, Harry set off toward the station exit, Hedwig rattling along in front of him, for what looked like a much better summer than the last. (*Azkaban* 317)

The gifting of plot-coupons structures positive social relationships on the basis of a trust that the giver understands and acknowledges what the receiver

³³ Sirius goes on to gift Harry with further plot-coupons, including an enchanted knife that opens any lock (Rowling, *Phoenix* 122), and a two-way mirror through which they can communicate in times of crisis (*Goblet* 322).

requires. This reciprocity, and the acknowledgment of the other person's needs in giving a gift, forms what Mauss argues is 'the enduring basis of law... the very principle of normal social life' (*Gift* 89). The Weasley twins' gift to Harry of the Marauder's Map (Rowling, *Azkaban* 187) is motivated by their understanding of Harry's desire to go to Hogsmeade, and the fact that the map is a plot-coupon which can assist him to do so.³⁴ Dilnot argues that 'the proper gift gives happiness because it matches perfectly the receiver's needs and desires' (51). An episode that evidences this happiness out of being gifted what one needs concerns Harry's fear of being starved by the Dursleys because Dudley has been forced to go on a diet.

The moment he had got wind of the fact that he was expected to survive the summer on carrot sticks, Harry had sent Hedwig to his friends with pleas for help, and they had risen to the occasion magnificently. Hedwig had returned from Hermione's house with a large box stuffed full of sugar-free snacks. (Hermione's parents were dentists.) Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, had obliged with a sack full of his own homemade rock cakes...Mrs. Weasley, however, had sent the family owl, Errol, with an enormous fruitcake and assorted meat pies...And then on Harry's birthday (which the Dursleys had completely ignored) he had received four superb birthday cakes, one each from Ron, Hermione, Hagrid, and Sirius. (*Goblet* 28)

The social relations Harry has developed with these characters yield concrete results for him by sending him food he needs to survive. Instead of economic currency, Harry cashes in on his social approval to complete the

³⁴ Similarly, when Sirius and Lupin are made aware of Harry's need to train himself and his peers in defensive magic, they choose an appropriate book for him which outlines highly advanced spells and how to use them (Rowling, *Phoenix* 343).

‘purchase’ of what he needs. ‘Organic gift systems are based on congruence between individuals’ (Giesler 289), and these instances of gifting portray how Harry’s organic relationship with his peers is reinforced through the image of the freely received gift which matches his exact need.

Unlike plot-vouchers and plot-coupons, there is a third category of gift which Harry receives. This category differs from the two previous ones in that they are of less practical value than objects which directly aid his quest. Instead, this category of gifts are loaded with symbolic value, and are signifiers of Harry’s inclusion in social circles and communities. These gifts almost exclusively utilise the ritual of gift-giving itself to derive their meaning. Rituals are certain rules which govern the cultural and social implications that give these gifts their value; gifts come to stand for relations through a cultural signification (Geertz, *Cultures* 57-78). Most often, traditions of the wizarding world are used to portray these ritual significations. Harry’s close friendship with Ron gradually makes him an adoptive family member of the Weasley family. This adoption, and the welcoming of Harry into their social community, is signified through the gifts the Weasleys give Harry. Mrs. Weasley knits jumpers for her sons as a Christmas tradition, and from the very first book, she begins to knit one for Harry as well. Moreover, she knits these clothes in designs that are custom-made for Harry.³⁵ Her decision to customise gifts for Harry imparts these with a symbolic value. ‘To make for us,’ Dilnot posits, ‘means that making is undertaken to create a world that acknowledges, knows, and recognizes us’ (56). Recognition from a wizarding family, and a symbolic

³⁵ In the first book, where Harry has become a quidditch player, she sends him a jumper with a golden snitch design (Rowling, *Stone* 184). In the fourth, she sends him one with a dragon design, to commemorate the Triwizard Tournament where he bested a dragon (*Goblet* 221).

adoption, gives Harry a social status he did not possess as an orphan living with the Dursleys.³⁶

Social relations based on recognition use rituals to refer to the receiver's sense of community identity. Mauss identifies that community identity is important to preserve the 'morality and organisation [which] still function in our societies' (Mauss, *Gift* 5). In the case of Harry, Rowling depicts this identity in terms of his recognition by other members of the community. Gifting is intrinsically linked to recognition as a member of one's community, by constructing a culture of exchange which 'expresses various degrees of relatedness and social distance' (van Hoof 24). Harry's close relationship to the Weasley family reaches a very powerful point in an episode where Mrs. Weasley formally accepts the cultural, traditional role of parent by gifting Harry a watch. Rowling frames this instance of gifting within an optimistic, warm scene.

Harry sat down, took the square parcel she had indicated and unwrapped it. Inside was a watch very like the one Mr and Mrs Weasley had given Ron for his seventeenth; it was gold, with stars circling round the face instead of hands.

"It's traditional to give a wizard a watch when he comes of age," said Mrs Weasley, watching him anxiously from beside the cooker. "I'm afraid that one isn't new like Ron's, it was actually my brother Fabian's and he wasn't terribly careful with his possessions, it's a bit dented on the back, but –"

³⁶ Rowling makes use of the orphan story trope to heighten the emotional appeal of this scene. As an orphan now adopted into a loving surrogate family, Harry is portrayed 'as a figure of hope [which] embodies widespread notions of self-improvement' (Gymnich 3). The presence of Mrs. Weasley as a maternal figure to replace the loss of his mother properly induces him into the family community he needs to establish social authority (Mauk 77).

The rest of her speech was lost; Harry had got up and hugged her. He tried to put a lot of unsaid things into the hug and perhaps she understood them, because she patted his cheek clumsily when he released her (Rowling, *Hallows* 62).

This gift represents two levels of symbolic value. On one level, it derives its value from the traditional ritual of gifting a pocket watch to a wizard who has come of age. For Harry, who has just turned adult, the watch is a material marker of his rite of passage. It allows him to be recognised by others as an adult. On another level, the watch is not new, but belonged to Mrs. Weasley's family. Transforming a family heirloom into a symbolic gift for Harry suggests that the Weasley family recognises him not only as an adult, but as a member of their own community. Rowling establishes a social relation of kinship between Harry and the Weasley family through this instance of gift-giving.³⁷ This depiction derives from the late 20th century European and American birthday and Christmas culture, where gifts are given on special occasions within kin networks to strengthen social bonds (Caplow, "Kin" 14-24).

The gifts that Harry receives, therefore, establish his social status within a network of other actors in the magical world. Rowling depicts his recognition by the wizarding community, as well as his relationship of mentorship and guardianship with adult wizards who aid him on his journey. For the successful proliferation of a gift economy, however, 'the obligation to reciprocate worthily is imperative' (Mauss, *Gift* 54). While at a more superficial level, gift-giving is perceived as unmotivated and devoid of self-interest, it involves the more subtle

³⁷ At the narrative level, this also foreshadows the future kinship between them, when Harry marries Ginny, and they along with their children become part of the Potter-Weasley family (Rowling, *Hallows* 722).

element of prestation. Mauss' use of this term is translated into English as 'total services' (7), but it is better understood as a system of obligatory indebtedness. Anthropological scholarship identifies prestation in terms of a 'larger economy of indebtedness,' wherein a gift is not a mere object, but part of a system of 'total prestation... in that its extension triggers cycles of mutual indebtedness' (Hilsdale 172). Unlike commodities which are exchanged for money, gift-giving is rewarded with social services, positive relationships, and public perceptions of moral authority. In the following section, I argue that while Harry's generosity is depicted in terms of his innate niceness and desire to share, this niceness is guided by his individual pursuit of prestation. His gift-giving yields him results in the economy of indebtedness in terms of social approval, allegiance, and a perception of his moral superiority. The rationale of self-interest drives this need, and conceals itself through the social, rather than economic, mode of responses Harry acquires by giving gifts.

3.2.2 Gifts Given by Harry: The Self-Interest of Philanthropic Niceness

The illusion of the freely given gift is central to gift economy, and Rowling uses it to serve an ideological purpose; to dissociate social relations in her books from an economic rationale. Instead, Harry's mode of behaviour in gifting people is depicted in terms of his innate niceness. The obligation of reciprocation in gifting culture is concealed in this portrayal of unmotivated, personal behaviour. 'The transformation of an act that should be based on love and free will,' Dilnot argues, 'into one based on social and economic obligation ensures that resentment dominates the relation' (52). Rowling avoids the depiction of this resentment by portraying Harry as someone who gifts without considering his economic status. His niceness, as Rowling depicts, can be

analysed as a philanthropic impulse. Erica Bornstein describes this impulse in terms of giving a ‘gift [as] as a liberatory mechanism... as opposed to the socially obligated context within which gifts are made meaningful’ (Bornstein, “Philanthropy” 626). Rowling insists that Harry gives gifts not as a conscious investment, but as motivated by charitable, philanthropic impulse. This insistence denies the presence of any rational, calculative behaviour behind his gift giving.

Rowling frequently depicts Harry’s niceness through his ‘spending small amounts of money on others’ (Westman, “Thatcherism 311). In his very first meeting with Ron on the Hogwarts Express, the eleven year old Harry readily buys and shares magical edibles with Ron, when it is implied that Ron does not have enough money to buy such food, and has an unappetising packed lunch from home. ‘It was a nice feeling’ for Harry to share food with Ron, we are told, as he ‘had never had anything to share before, or, indeed, anyone to share it with’” (Rowling, *Stone* 76). This episode represents Harry’s niceness, and desire to buy lunch for Ron as a function of his individual, emotional response. His gift is portrayed as free and voluntary, ‘the gift given on impulse,’ which ‘stands against that which is rendered accountable through individual action’ (Bornstein, “Philanthropy” 626).³⁸ Similarly, he impulsively buys expensive gifts for Ron and Hermione at the Quidditch World Cup, when he realises they cannot afford the items.

“Three pairs,” said Harry firmly to the wizard.

³⁸ Harry’s philanthropic impulse, therefore, originates from an expressivist moral instinct, guided by a desire to be reciprocally recognised by Ron, and to feel good about a charitable gesture (Gibbard 45-77). While this impulse in itself is not an undesirable one, it nevertheless fails to accommodate any productive ethical introspection.

“No — don’t bother,” said Ron, going red. He was always touchy about the fact that Harry, who had inherited a small fortune from his parents, had much more money than he did.

“You won’t be getting anything for Christmas,” Harry told him, thrusting Omnioculars into his and Hermione’s hands. “For about ten years, mind.”

“Fair enough,” said Ron, grinning. (Rowling, *Goblet* 92-93)

Harry’s actions are entirely framed by his personal desire to be nice to his friends, and while Ron’s source of embarrassment is acknowledged to be his financial inferiority, the economic aspect of this social situation is entirely ignored in Harry’s response. He half-jokingly ends the conversation by telling his friends they ‘won’t be getting anything for Christmas,’ which displaces the conversation from possible introspection with the economic reality itself to dismissive humour. Ron’s protest features more as customary social etiquette, and he ends the conversation laughing it off, while Hermione merely thanks him for his gift (93). In both these situations, Harry’s decision is thus portrayed as rooted in an innate, philanthropic niceness. This construction conceals the fact that Harry does not think too much about sharing with friends because he has the economic capital to afford it. Instead, the focus on his personal pleasure in sharing is highlighted as the motivator of his niceness. Westman comments on Harry’s niceness as an organic feature of who he is, arguing that he shares ‘actual gifts, with no expectation of a gift in return,’ because ‘they give Harry pleasure’ (Westman, “Thatcherism” 311).

Analysing Harry’s pleasure in sociological terms, however, demonstrates that it is not an abstract emotional reaction but a product of tangible social

profit. Building on Mauss' work, Mary Douglas argues that while 'charity is meant to be a free gift, a voluntary, unrequited surrender of resources... a gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction' (ix-x, Mauss, *Gift*). Social solidarity, in terms of indebtedness, is exactly what Harry receives by buying lunch for Ron on the first day of school. Ron Weasley is the first empathetic child character Harry interacts with on friendly terms. His childhood prior to being initiated into the magical world was marked by bullying, abuse, and a toxic hatred for his magical identity (Rowling, *Stone* 20-38). By virtue of his wizardly birth, Ron possesses knowledge of magical life which Harry needs to prepare himself, before he is thrust into Hogwarts. While Harry does exercise niceness in buying lunch for Ron, this purchase is also a transaction which marks the beginning of a social relationship.³⁹ Moreover, this initial act of gift-giving provides the foundation for the cycle of indebtedness which continues to strengthen the social solidarity between Harry and the Weasley family.⁴⁰ Harry's gift-giving therefore yields concrete returns in form of social solidarity and indebtedness, as he acquires the Weasleys as valuable and committed allies throughout his quest.

Analysing Harry's gift-giving in the light of this economy of indebtedness, or prestation, thus reveals a rationale behind his behaviour governed by self-interest. Sen makes a crucial distinction between two forms of

³⁹ This social relationship is one of reciprocity. Harry's gift to Ron is not an act of unrequited charity at all, as both children bring something to the table. Harry, at a position of economic privilege over Ron, offers his purchasing power of gifts. Ron, in exchange, introduces and familiarises Harry to the everyday elements of wizardly school life which the latter is now beginning (Rowling, *Stone* 74-84).

⁴⁰ As demonstrated earlier, the Weasleys give Harry many gifts to symbolise their recognition of him as a member of their community. At a later episode, Mrs. Weasley consciously identifies this initial interaction as the cornerstone of that relationship, by telling Harry that 'it was a lucky day for the Weasleys when Ron decided to sit in your compartment on the Hogwarts Express' (Rowling, *Prince* 266).

economic altruism; commitment and sympathy. An act of commitment, Sen defines, involves ‘a person choosing an act that he believes will yield *a lower level of personal welfare* to him than an alternative’ (“Fools” 327). The logic behind this apparently ‘irrational’ act, which goes against self-interest, can be explained if one considers how this is tempered by a simultaneous act of sympathy. A selfless act of commitment is urged by an initial impulse of sympathy, wherein ‘a person’s sense of well-being is psychologically dependent on someone else’s welfare’ (327). Psychological well-being is a function of social solidarity and relationships. In giving gifts, Harry tends to his own psychological well-being by acting positively towards the gift-receiver’s welfare.⁴¹ Thus, while his gifting diminishes some of his economic capital, his financial affluence renders this diminishment negligible compared to his increase in psychological (and social) capital. Such an act, therefore, is also governed by self-interest. A significant gain in social approval and psychological well-being, through the gifting of economic capital, is made evident in the closing chapters of the fourth book, where he gifts all of his prize money to the twins.

“Listen,” said Harry firmly. “If you don’t take it, I’m throwing it down the drain. I don’t want it and I don’t need it. But I could do with a few laughs. We

⁴¹ What this mode of behaviour conceals at the narrative level is that Harry’s gift-giving is contingent on his already having inherited a remarkable amount of wealth from his parents (Rowling, *Stone* 82). He can function primarily at the level of his psychological well-being *because* his economic well-being had been taken care of at the moment of his entry into the magical world (81). Harry’s model of charity follows the rationale of philanthrocapitalism, which is used to assuage class resentment under neoliberal inequality. This rationale shifts ‘traditional grant-making or the democratic processes of civil society,’ which work towards a collective accumulation of public funding, towards individualistic impulses of charitability (Bishop, “Philanthrocapitalism” 477). In the long-run, a model of economic action whose charitable assistance of the financially inferior depends on the *very* existence of a minority who own a disparate amount of wealth fails to address the hierarchy.

could all do with a few laughs. I've got a feeling we're going to need them more than usual before long."

"Harry," said George weakly, weighing the money bag in his hands, "there's got to be a thousand Galleons in here."

"Yeah," said Harry, grinning... (Rowling, *Goblet* 433).

Harry's rationale behind gifting the twins his entire prize money is guided doubly by his pursuit of psychological well-being. On one hand, he desires to morally distance himself from money which is now tainted with the memory of his co-champion, Cedric's murder (387). On the other, the Weasleys are his closest social companions, and his well-being depends on their ability to go and have 'a few laughs' (433).⁴² Harry's action is rational because he truly 'does not need' the money (*Goblet* 433); while giving away a thousand galleons does not diminish his already immense amount of inherited wealth, it gains him significant social and psychological benefits in terms of the twins' social indebtedness. This analysis of gift-giving as based on social self-interest helps address Mendlesohn's critique that 'for all his supposed generosity, Harry Potter does not often use his money to assist Ron' ("Crowning" 173). Harry's assistance of Ron, or others, is ultimately secondary to how his gift-giving affects *his own* emotional self. Because what he gains in return are social benefits, rather than economic profit, his behaviour is portrayed as dissociated from any ulterior motivations. However, this analysis of the role of prestation in his gifts reveals how his actions are governed by the rationale of self-interest.

⁴² Rowling portrays this investment as a pointedly non-economic one, as evidenced later by Harry's refusal to cash in on this and get free commodities from the Weasleys' shop (*Prince* 144). His gifting is governed by a self-interest in seeking out social solidarity, and distancing himself from the traumatic memory of the tournament.

Harry gives gifts out of his self-interest in earning social indebtedness, not because he believes in any moral obligation to address the economic hierarchy itself.

This economic hierarchy exists and functions to allow Harry the platform to exercise his gifting behaviour in the first place. His transaction with Ron and the Weasleys is founded on both his economic power, as well as the receiver's lack of the same. Teare identifies Harry's generosity as 'a means for Rowling to sidestep the most painful consequences...of her magical world's commodity culture' ("Technology" 341). Interpreting Harry's gift-giving within an economy of indebtedness, however, demonstrates that his generosity is not simply a means to sidestep the realities of economic hierarchy, but presented as the only possible mode of moral action. Since Harry's gift-giving creates networks of indebtedness and social approval, he shall always require social and economic inferiors *on* whom he can act and dispense gifts to maintain his status. Mendlesohn argues that the poverty of the Weasleys is 'a shorthand for moral virtue' ("Crowning" 173). I build on this observation to argue that not only are poverty and social inferiority narrative markers of virtue, but the very site where Harry demonstrates his moral virtue and authority. Mauss argues that in gift economies, a figure in a position of power 'can only maintain his authority... by [his] good fortune... and he can only prove this good fortune by spending it and sharing it out' (*Gift* 50). The social authority of such a figure is dependent upon a consistent presence of economic inferiors he can share gifts with, thereby reinforcing his social status.⁴³ Harry's figure as a moral authority, approved by

⁴³ Annette Weiner contends that giving gifts in certain cultures helps provide the donor with a social perception of authority, which 'occurs because one person is always dependent on another to achieve a feeling of completeness.' Such hierarchies of authority, she contends, can be 'more formidable than mere

his peers, is fixed by the presence of economic foils like Ron who he helps out. This link between moral authority and gifts to inferiors is portrayed even more clearly when Harry and Ron interact with Dobby, who as a house-elf is constructed as ontologically inferior to humans.

“Tell you what, Dobby — here you go — take these two, and you can mix them up properly. And here’s your sweater.”

He threw Dobby a pair of violet socks he had just unwrapped, and the hand-knitted sweater Mrs. Weasley had sent. Dobby looked quite overwhelmed.

“Sir is very kind!” he squeaked, his eyes brimming with tears again, bowing deeply to Ron. “Dobby knew sir must be a great wizard, for he is Harry Potter’s greatest friend, but Dobby did not know that he was also as generous of spirit, as noble, as selfless —”

“They’re only socks,” said Ron, who had gone slightly pink around the ears, though he looked rather pleased all the same (Rowling, *Goblet* 202).

Dobby’s worshipful respect towards Ron and Harry because he has been gifted clothes, his favourite objects, portrays the importance of gift-giving in establishing hierarchies.⁴⁴ Dobby is overwhelmed with joy when Harry gifts him

economic relations’ (*Inalienable* 31). While Harry’s gift-giving is a compensatory mechanism in alleviating any class resentment, the very moral authority he gains from gift giving is fundamentally dependent on the existence of this hierarchy in the first place.

⁴⁴ Rowling celebrates Harry’s (and Ron’s) niceness by highlighting how much a small act of niceness can signify to a social inferior, thus portraying the boys’ acknowledgment of Dobby’s likes and dislikes as an equal. However, what this conceals is that this niceness is dependent firstly on the unusually high sign value clothes hold for the elf compared to humans, which magnifies the significance of the gift given (Bhabha 112), and secondly on the underlying fact that Dobby’s previous masters had been horribly cruel to him, which serves to further contrast Harry and Ron as particularly benevolent (Rowling, *Chamber* 31). It is the already, fundamentally skewed dynamic of power between the dominant saviour and the subaltern subject (Spivak 77-79) which makes such a negligible gift have such a magnified affective impact. Harry’s gift-giving thus serves to not so much address, as signify back towards and reinforce his authority over Dobby, no matter how benevolent.

socks, despite the fact that they are Harry's 'oldest and foulest, mustard yellow, and had once belonged to Uncle Vernon' (202). While they hold no economic or sentimental value for Harry, they become objects imbued with the social contract of gifting, as Dobby acknowledges Harry's moral authority. These social hierarchies are maintained through the illusion of the freely given gift, which 'gives joy because the successful gift affirms a positive relationship between giver and receiver' (Dilnot 51). This positive relationship, in case of Dobby, involves a tangible social reward for Harry. Not only does Dobby later help him survive and win a tournament task (Rowling, *Goblet* 244-256), but his devotion to Harry leads him to ultimately sacrifice his life in rescuing Harry and his peers from Voldemort (*Hallows* 412-413). Gaining such a crucial ally, voluntarily accepting Harry's social and moral authority over him, is established through these rituals of gift-giving. The positive and optimistic scenes of Harry giving gifts to Dobby conceals the underlying connotation that the efficiency of these rituals derives from the elf's inferiority to Harry to begin with.

Maintaining social authority is also achieved in gift economies through demonstrations of graciousness in accepting gifts from social inferiors. Mauss contends that authority is only maintained by establishing the cyclical nature of gift-giving, and the obligation to receive is equally important as gift-giving (*Gift* 16-18). To use Sen's terminology again, Harry's reception of gifts from inferiors, even if the gifts are unwanted, is a marker of his sympathetic rationale where he acknowledges the psychological well-being of the gift-giver (22).

Hagrid's gifts to Harry are important examples of this pattern of gifting. Hagrid is fixed by Rowling as a perpetual outsider to wizardly society. He lives at the edge of the forest, prefers the company of his animals to people, and is not a full

member of the magical society as he was expelled from Hogwarts at thirteen (Rowling, *Stone* 77-85, *Chamber* 119).⁴⁵ Like Dobby, he is a character whose existence serves to let Harry demonstrate his niceness; unlike the pointedly evil characters who are bigoted towards the gamekeeper, Harry treats him with love and respect. Thus, Harry's moral authority is marked by his sensitivity towards Hagrid's feelings. He frequently receives gifts from Hagrid that are useless, including cakes which are so hard they are inedible (Rowling, *Goblet* 24), or an enchanted purse which he cannot use without being bitten by the fangs on it (*Azkaban* 133). As objects, the gifts themselves have no use-value. But by acknowledging Hagrid's gesture, and having the grace to not deny the gifts, Harry exercises a moral superiority in terms of his personal niceness. As with Ron and Dobby, Harry's social behaviour is governed by his self-interest to acquire Hagrid's loyalty and allegiance. In the final book, Hagrid confirms this acquisition by saving Harry's life while risking his own in a flight from their enemies (*Hallows* 45-51).

Gift giving, therefore, serves a distinct social function for Harry.

However, to return to Dilnot's analysis, giving a gift must always be represented as 'an act that should be based on love and free will.' Rowling maintains this illusion, and hides the role of 'social and economic obligation' (Dilnot 52), through the use of foil characters. We have demonstrated in the episodes with Ron and Hermione how Harry does not acknowledge economic matters, but gives gifts out of a personal, emotional sense of niceness. In the final section, I

⁴⁵ Although not ontologically separate from his human acquaintances to the same degree as Dobby, he is similarly racially 'othered' through his half-giant ancestry, and speaks in a dialect which Mendlesohn identifies as clearly meant to signify his lack of class and sophistication ("Crowning" 172). Hagrid, too, exists as a marginal character who serves to highlight how morally good others are depending on their levels of niceness to him.

argue that the moral superiority of Harry's mode of behaviour is reinforced through the portrayal of foil characters who *do* make the social and economic obligations behind their interaction with gifts visible. Mendlesohn argues that moral judgment is reserved in the books based on 'not how money is used, but who has it' ("Crowning" 176). I argue that while the positive or negative portrayal of who has money does determine moral character, these portrayals are based on the relative visibility of monetary concerns. This cultural construction is again influenced by the neoliberal necessity to conceal the impact of economic rationale in everyday behaviour.⁴⁶ Moral judgment in the books does not judge *what* characters use money to buy, but whether the monetary aspect of transactions are made visible by them. I demonstrate that Harry is offered as a morally superior character because his gift-giving depends on a personal quality of niceness, dissociated from economic introspection. The behaviour of his foils, on the other hand, is depicted as undesirable because they make the monetary and coercive motivations behind their gift-giving visible at the narrative level. Rowling thus determines moral character in the books based on a successful maintenance of the illusion of gift culture as social, not economic. Ideologically, this allows the neoliberal insistence on an inevitably hierarchical life to go

⁴⁶ More specifically, this impulse is also one of philanthrocapitalism (Bishop, "Philanthrocapitalism" 477-482), which achieves the invisibility of overt economic rationale by transforming discussions about money into a culturally unpleasant taboo. In her book *Uneasy Street: Anxieties of Affluence* (2017), Rachel Sherman argues that in neoliberal culture, people who earn disparately more try to compensate for an internalised guilt by declining to discuss their financial status, even to the extent of not telling their children how much they are worth (1-27). This helps shift the burden of their moral anxiety away from structural, economic concerns to a conversational sense of niceness or decency (92-121). Sherman directly references Rowling as a popular public figure who espouses this ideology (230-238). What this behaviour effectively accomplishes is the concealment of the economic realities of disparity under the veneer of prioritising decency and compensatory niceness of not talking about money. As long as the reality of financial status and disparity are concealed from public discourse, Rowling's narrative can successfully draw attention away from the fact that people who decline to speak of their financial status usually do so because they can *afford* to in the first place.

unchallenged, because the good characters displace their behaviour to the register of individual, social relationships instead.

3.3. Morals of Gift-Giving: Niceness as Concealment of the Economic Rationale

As I demonstrated in the previous section, Harry's social behaviour and gift-giving operates within an economy of indebtedness. His exercise of moral authority is itself made contingent upon a hierarchical world where 'certain people must be left behind' (Littler 3). While Teare identifies that the poverty of the Weasleys represents the 'difficulties faced by people who don't have enough money to provide their children with the commodities that trigger self-esteem in capitalist culture' ("Technology" 340-341), these difficulties are never alleviated at the structural level. Instead, the difficulty of the Weasleys is displayed as the very space within which Harry functions as a good samaritan in alleviating their worries, and gaining social approval. David Cannadine comments on a traditional British view of capitalism as 'an unequal society characterized by a seamless web of layered gradations... which were sanctioned by tradition' (*Ornamentalism* 105). Rowling structures her world as a similarly unequal and traditionally fixed hierarchy. Within this hierarchy, the cultural practice of gift-giving serves to dissociate social life from the visibility of 'a market economy in which transactions led to material gain,' displacing such relations onto promises of 'mutual aid to help alleviate those problems' (Weinbren 335). The morality of mutual aid, therefore, depends on its efficiency in concealing any economic

or socially motivated agenda, insisting that acts of gift-giving are entirely social, and entirely dependent on a desire to aid the receiver.⁴⁷

I demonstrate in this section two categories of foil characters Rowling employs to portray Harry's model of gift-giving as superior and morally preferable. Firstly, through a comparison of how gifts are received by Dudley and Harry, I demonstrate that while the former is depicted as an undesirable character, Harry's behaviour is socially approved. This distinction depends partly on the characterisation of Dudley, which is saturated with social markers of moral failure. However, the distinction is also drawn between Dudley and his parents' coercive and visible flaunting of financial power in gifting, as opposed to Harry's responses to economic questions in terms of personal discomfort. By making the monetary aspect of gifts visible, Dudley as foil fails to maintain the illusion of organic niceness. Harry's refusal to acknowledge these monetary concerns portrays a noble detachment from such issues, he is 'above' thinking too much about money. This construction conceals the fact that Harry is 'above' thinking about money because he can afford to (Sherman, *Uneasy* 100-119).

Secondly, overt personal agendas behind the giving of gifts is also portrayed as a foil. A number of characters give gifts based on social or ideological statements they wish to make themselves. Such models of gift-

⁴⁷ These two behavioural strategies, keeping possible self-interest invisible and maximising the perception of one's moral superiority through gift-giving, reinforce each other. In modern neoliberal culture, the financially wealthy distance themselves from discussions of money to conceal economic reality from social discourse. This distancing shifts the notions of moral action to social niceness from any introspection into the roots of hierarchical inequality. This niceness is further reinforced in public perception through acts of gift-giving or 'giving back' to the community (Sherman, *Uneasy* 122-154). Reciprocally, this public identity as a voluntary gift-giver strengthens the individual's social relationships with inferiors, and further dissociates their behaviour from the financial disparity which makes their charitability possible. This double-bind ensures a neoliberal proliferation of self-interest as sublimated in everyday social behaviour, without making it overtly visible in its true, economic aspect.

giving are denounced as selfish, or unproductive. Harry, instead, deeply understands and appreciates what the receiver of the gift would desire to possess. His gift-giving, therefore, is based on a notion of performative empathy, where he acknowledges the voice of the other, and chooses gifts according to their, not his, preferences. This model of performative empathy, or acknowledging the other's identity, forms the chief emotional mode of moral action in the books, as I shall discuss in Chapter 4.

3.3.1 The Economics of Gift-Giving: Crude Visibility versus Liberal Discomfort

The first child character introduced as Harry's foil is Dudley, his cousin. Rowling uses a negative portrayal of Dudley and his family to reinforce Harry's moral superiority, by marking the Dursleys as overtly greedy and desperate for social reputation. I have analysed the gifts that Harry receives and forms social relationships through, as well as the indebtedness he pursues through his own gift-giving. What sets him apart from the Dursleys on both counts is the narrative denial of any conscious motivation behind his actions. Magical social life embeds the economic rationale of self-interest concealed within the depiction of interpersonal, social relations. To portray the Dursleys as morally undesirable, Rowling structures their behaviour in an opposite manner; every economic and social decision they take are guided by conscious motivations of self-interest. It is this barefaced greed that serves to depict their crudeness, and sets them apart from Harry's socially motivated mode of niceness and gift-giving without any visible agenda.

The Dursleys are introduced as sticklers for material enterprise, and are characterised as deeply boring and suspicious of anything unusual that may

disturb their visible veneer of social propriety (Rowling, *Stone* 7-15). From the very beginning of the first book, it is made evident that they spoil their son an inordinate amount, responding by showing him lenient affection when he is portrayed as ‘having a tantrum and throwing his cereal at the wall’ (8). This behaviour dominates Dudley’s childhood, and he grows up to be a bully who relentlessly tortures the adopted and orphaned Harry. The two children’s opposing views towards gift culture construct them as foils during Dudley’s birthday. Harry is never given any gifts by his uncle and aunt, and has learned to never expect any. He wears Dudley’s old clothes, lives in a cupboard under the stairs, and wears ‘round glasses held together with a lot of Scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose’ (24). Dudley, in sharp contrast, is very spoilt.⁴⁸ Contrasted to Harry’s warm, emotional responses to receiving gifts as analysed earlier, Dudley overtly refers to gifts as economic transactions, and his parents approve of this behaviour as an early sign of his business acumen. Even at eleven years of age, he is portrayed to be outraged at receiving less birthday gifts than the previous year, and his parents actively encourage his visible greed by lauding it as his skill at enterprise.

“And we’ll buy you another two presents while we’re out today. How’s that, popkin...”

Dudley thought for a moment. It looked like hard work. Finally he said slowly,

“So I’ll have thirty . . . thirty . . .”

“Thirty-nine, sweetums,” said Aunt Petunia.

⁴⁸ Rowling uses gluttony as a narrative attribute to portray his greed. While in the first book he is merely ‘very fat and hated exercise’ (24), by the fourth book he is depicted in explicit terms as having the size of ‘a baby killer whale’ (*Goblet* 21).

“Oh.” Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. “All right then.”

Uncle Vernon chuckled.

“Little tyke wants his money’s worth, just like his father. ’Atta boy, Dudley!”

He ruffled Dudley’s hair (*Stone* 25-26).

Dudley does not acknowledge gifts in their capacity as tokens of social relations, but displaces them to the register of commodities by referring to the monetary value of such objects. His father recognises, and openly encourages, this financially motivated behaviour.⁴⁹ While the Dursleys acknowledge and actively manipulate the economic aspects of social life, Harry’s niceness derives from his refusal to engage with monetary matters publicly. His impoverished life at the Dursleys, and his perception of their distasteful, somewhat comical obsession with wealth, can be read as a factor behind his tendency to avoid the cultural unpleasantness of addressing money in social discourse (Sherman, *Uneasy* 230-234). Harry’s detachment from matters of money is consciously lauded as a marker of his moral superiority to Dudley. Most notably, this is voiced by the authority figure of Dumbledore, who admonishes the Dursleys for making Harry go through his childhood as an unloved, impoverished orphan. Dumbledore says that Harry ‘has known nothing but neglect and often cruelty at your hands. The best that can be said is that he has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy sitting between you’

⁴⁹ This is further evidenced in *Chamber of Secrets*, where Mr. Dursley hosts his boss at office, and meticulously trains his family to socially flatter them. He suggests that ‘we should aim to get in a few good compliments at dinner,’ to which his son replies with an over-the-top, sentimental suggestion. Their son’s ability to flatter people makes them proud, and Mrs. Dursley ‘bursts into tears’ with pride. This conversation ends when Mr. Dursley is satisfied that everyone is well-trained in their etiquette, and comments that ‘with any luck, I’ll have the deal signed and sealed before the news at ten. Be shopping for a vacation home in Majorca this time tomorrow’ (10-11). Unlike the modes of social behaviour demonstrated with respect to Harry and his peers, the Dursleys consciously make the economic desire for commodities visible in their performative social patterns of behaviour.

(Rowling, *Prince* 16). Rowling makes her ideological message clear in this episode; to live in visible affluence and be greedy like Dudley is a morally inferior option to Harry's niceness, which derives from the invisibility of economic concern in his social behaviour. What this social view of morality as niceness or decency conceals is that Harry has as much or possibly more money than Dudley does. Who has money does not seem to be as much the contributing factor behind claiming the narrative moral high ground, as much as how visible one makes their financial worth.

Harry's characterisation as a noble character because he has not been tempted by money constructs his morality as a social, individual mode of behaviour. While not being concerned with money is portrayed as laudable through the undesirable behaviour of the Dursleys as foil, this lack of concern is ultimately dependent on the fact that Harry *does* have money. His initial inheritance from his parents (*Stone* 77) is further expanded when Sirius leaves him his entire wealth after his death (*Prince* 34-37). As demonstrated with respect to who Harry gives gifts to, and how, his moral authority is contingent upon this economic capital he chooses to share with his economic inferiors. The neoliberal construction of Harry's social behaviour is governed by his self-interest, because his reluctance to talk about money also allows him to effectively sidestep any possible, fruitful discussion about economic inequality.⁵⁰ This refusal of conversations about money in social discourse

⁵⁰ This strategy is the reason why neoliberal governmentality depends so crucially on the cultural taboo on social discourse about money. Niceness and questions of decency, while helping one's social perception as a moral individual, helps them to recuse themselves from conversations when they veer towards notions of economic inequality. Bodinger-deUriarte observes how 'Harry's attitudes and actions towards particular realities of the magical world underscore a type of "just world hypothesis," which comprises a passive 'accepting [of] the social inequalities' his magical world is governed by (68). It is Rowling's conflation of moral value with reluctance to discuss money that allows Harry to exercise this passivity without seeming apathetic to others.

structures a magical society where individuals are ‘wholly bounded entities’ (Littler 82). Within such a hierarchical society, any moral action is restricted to how Harry chooses to act individually. While Harry is aware of his economic privilege over his inferiors, his mode of action in engaging with this inequality effectively sidesteps any possibility of addressing its possible economic roots. Contrasted to the Dursleys, Harry’s approach to the presence of this inequality itself is governed by an emotional sense of embarrassment and shame. This is palpable in the narrative depiction of his discovery of the Weasley’s poverty at Gringotts Bank.

Harry enjoyed the breakneck journey down to the Weasley’s vault, but felt dreadful...when it was opened. There was a very small pile of silver Sickles inside, and just one gold Galleon. Mrs Weasley felt right into the corners before sweeping the whole lot into her bag. Harry felt even worse when they reached his vault. He tried to block the contents from view as he hastily shoved handfuls of coins into the leather bag (Rowling, *Chamber* 47).

This awkwardness, Mendlesohn argues, ‘remains a cosy, liberal discomfort, not the basis for action’ (“Crowning” 173). In magical society, where moral behaviour is identified in individual acts of gift giving, this discomfort necessarily remains a passive one because it is an entirely individualistic response. There is no acknowledgment of the underlying causes of poverty or economic disparity in Harry’s emotional response. As with the notion of the invisible hand of magic, this economic hierarchy of the wizarding world is offered as a common sense reality, with no narrative scope of ‘argument with the universe’ (*Rhetorics* 17). Thus, the novel never explains the logic behind the poverty of the Weasleys, given that four out of seven members

of the family work full-time government jobs (Rowling, *Stone* 25). Instead, the Weasleys' poverty simply exists, because without the hierarchy there would be no mode of behaviour for Harry to exhibit his niceness, and therefore his moral value. Portraying moral action in terms of gift-giving and niceness is what constructs Harry as a moral individual.⁵¹ This ideological narrative is resonant with the neoliberal vision of a fixed, hierarchical world, where the only mode of moral action is individual action. Rowling uses the conservative ideology of her fantasy to perpetuate this principle.

A world structured in this manner, as Mendlesohn identifies, is one which 'embod(ies) conservative and hierarchical notions of authority clothed in evangelistic mythopoeic fantasy' ("Crowning" 181).⁵² In a status quo where hierarchies, and therefore the socio-economically inferior, must always exist, very little conversation can be allowed about class differences. Even when initiated, such conversation in Rowling's world is necessarily halted by 'the assertion that this world has always existed' (*Rhetorics* xx), and justified by the established moral unpleasantness of discussing money in social discourse (Sherman, *Uneasy* 122-154). This is evident in an episode where economic

⁵¹ Harry's liberal discomfort at witnessing the Weasley family's inferiority is a specifically post 1970s neoliberal impulse to treat matters of inequality as social and cultural issues, rather than economic ones (Pfaller 1-2). Rowling portrays this discomfort as a marker of how nice, and consequently how morally virtuous he is, to feel so guilty and embarrassed on behalf of the Weasleys. This guilt, however, remains an inert emotional impulse, which silences any possible introspection. While his niceness and silence about money in public discourse (unlike the Dursleys) marks him as a good individual in the books, performative niceness is precisely what silences minority voices in an unequal hierarchy (Villareal et al. 127-144; Sierk 37-53). Chapter 4 demonstrates how niceness, as a morally sufficient behavioural model, aids neoliberal hegemony by shifting questions of justice from the pragmatic space of economic and structural introspection to the shallow site of performative social behaviour.

⁵² Indeed, it is this attribute which makes Rowling's conservative fantasy an efficient medium for neoliberal values. On one hand, the hegemonic organisation of a world governed by the invisible hand of magic fixes in place an immutably unequal and hierarchical view of the world (Littler 3-17; Greve 39-56). On the other, the conflation of niceness with reluctance to talk about money effectively silences any insightful questions into the roots of the hierarchy, and insists on the regulatory, impersonal role of the market as a great equaliser, while inequality remains endemic to the system (Spicker 67-76; Perez-Arce et al. 41-50).

concerns are raised, only to be dismissed awkwardly by shifting the conversation to different topics. Following Harry's buying gifts for Ron and Hermione, discussed earlier, Ron discovers that he had paid Harry back in enchanted gold which vanishes after a while. A little insulted, he confronts Harry about never telling him about it.

"Must be nice," Ron said abruptly, when they had sat down and started serving themselves roast beef and Yorkshire puddings. "To have so much money you don't notice if a pocketful of Galleons go missing..."

Ron speared a roast potato on the end of his fork, glaring at it. Then he said, "I hate being poor."

Harry and Hermione looked at each other. Neither of them really knew what to say (Rowling, *Goblet* 474).

The conversation, highlighting Ron's economic class resentment, goes nowhere beyond Harry and Hermione's passive acknowledgment of the same. Harry's awkward silence stems from his discomfort in discussing money as an unpleasant affair, and fails to be a basis for effective action or even conversation. This is because while his discomfort is bounded by an individualistic acknowledgment of Ron's resentment, effective conversation would require the child characters to address the hierarchical status quo itself. Since the hierarchy is structured as a common sense reality, further dissociated from social discourse through the notion of decency, the conversation inevitably stops. Harry's discomfort, and inability to formulate a productive response to Ron's resentment, is made palpable in his awkward silence, and Hermione's weak attempt to cheer Ron up by saying, 'come on, Ron, it could be worse'

(Rowling, *Goblet* 474). After a few brief sentences, Hermione shifts the conversation entirely to a different topic, and this issue is never addressed in the book again (475).

Harry's failure to offer Ron any productive response is dependent on the rationale behind his giving of the gift. Since he had bought the Omnioculars and gifted them as a social act, what he received in return was social solidarity and companionship. Ron's paying him back in enchanted gold, from his perspective, was not an important aspect of the transaction. Thus, when Ron brings it up, the economic aspect is alien to his individual mode of perceiving gift-giving as social intercourse. Unlike the Dursleys, who consider social life in terms of the 'mere economic exchange of useful goods,' Harry is portrayed as a moral individual who gives gifts 'in a noble fashion, apparently in a disinterested and modest way' (Mauss, *Gift* 28). This portrayal also establishes the moral individual's right to refusal of engagement with economic hierarchies. This idea of compensatory niceness as a means to control class resentment is very much a function of neoliberal etiquette, and makes use of gift culture and social behaviour to deny the economic roots of action.⁵³

Niceness, as a mode of social interaction, also involves a dimension of performative empathy. This is different from empathy as an moral mode,

⁵³ The primary success of this strategy under neoliberal governmentality is its ability to dissociate the collectively cultural issue of class resentment from the economic reality of class conflict. While class conflict perpetually exists as a necessary outcome of capitalism societies, it does not always manifest as class resentment, which expresses itself through the medium of social solidarity or specific political impulses. The shifting of post 1970s activism to cultural spheres and performative, compensatory niceness, has been successful from the neoliberal point of view, due to its efficiency in reducing class resentment in public discourse. The erstwhile powerful solidarity of class-based politics has been reduced to fragmentary identity politics across several lines (Stout, *Identity* 1-20). Compensatory niceness functions to reduce class-based friction, and keep class conflict away from effective social and political discourse.

because it relies solely on the performative act of listening to and acknowledging the different identity of an ‘other.’ There is no effort to engage with or investigate the roots of the difference between such identities. I discuss in Chapter 4 how performative empathy as the preferred moral mode of behaviour is depicted through contrasting interactions of characters with house-elves and animals and pets. In the next section, I provide an analysis of how this empathy, in terms of the acknowledgment of what the *receiver*, not the *giver* of the gift, desires, is provided as a model of good gift-giving in the books.

3.3.2 The Politics of Gift-Giving: Imposing Ideals versus Acknowledging the Other

In Section 3.2.1, I analysed the different categories of gifts received by Harry, and the different forms of social relations they serve to construct. There is a fourth category of gifts he receives, which cannot be grouped with the other three, because they serve no social purpose. Dilnot argues that for a gift to function successfully, and create an economy of indebtedness, the receiver must find ‘additional joy in being the subject of the imaginative work undertaken by the giver in securing and giving this gift.’ There must be a social insistence, therefore, that the giver has chosen as an article of gift an object that has value for the receiver. Such a ‘successful gift proves to us that our relationship to the giver is more than merely formal or nominal’ (Dilnot 52). There are instances in the books of objects being given which do not succeed as gifts, precisely because they make their formal or nominal status visible. I analyse the failure of such gifts in this section, and demonstrate how they are contrasted with Harry’s niceness and acknowledgment of the receivers’ desire that goes behind his gift-giving.

Occasionally, unsuccessful gifts are given out of grudging social obligation. The Dursleys, regardless of their hatred for Harry, are very orthodox when it comes to following social norms. Therefore, each Christmas, they send gifts to Harry. Such gifts make it abundantly clear that they are simply observing the social obligation without any interest in Harry's well-being. The first such gift is enclosed with a note which says, 'we receive your message and enclose your Christmas present. From Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia.' The gift itself is revealed to be a fifty-pence piece (Rowling, *Stone* 185). This comic juxtaposition of a formal greeting with a ridiculously trivial gift serves to portray the undesirability of gifting out of mere obligation.⁵⁴ Other characters use the occasion of social obligations to deliberately gift Harry unpleasant objects, to express their social disapproval and resentment towards him. Aunt Marge, Mr. Dursley's sister makes her preference for Dudley over Harry known by gifting the former a computerised robot, and the latter a pack of dog biscuits (*Azkaban* 34). In an episode which highlights Harry's niceness, shows him partially trusting a gift-giver, only to receive a nasty surprise.

Harry's presents included...a slightly damp, moldy-smelling package that came with a label reading *To Master, From Kreacher*.

"I didn't think of giving Kreacher anything. Do people usually give their house-elves Christmas presents?" asked Harry, prodding the parcel cautiously.

"Hermione would," said Ron. "But let's wait and see what it is before you start feeling guilty."

⁵⁴ The Dursley's gifts to Harry become progressively more comical over the books, ranging from a single toothpick (*Chamber* 143) to a single tissue, which Harry describes as 'an all-time low' (*Goblet* 410).

A moment later, Harry had given a loud yell and leapt out of his camp bed; the package contained a large number of maggots. “Nice,” said Ron, roaring with laughter. “Very thoughtful” (*Prince* 222).

These gifts, therefore, do not serve the purpose of establishing social relationships. Instead, they misuse patterns of social obligation to make personal statements. The success of these items as gifts, therefore, is denied by their lack of acknowledging the receiver’s desires. Instead, they are expressions of the givers’ hostility. Perhaps the most extreme example of this is Hermione receiving mail from a woman who is angry at her, based on certain rumours spread by a corrupt journalist. When she opens the envelope, she finds it filled with a toxic magical substance called Bubotuber pus, which causes her hand to burn and painfully ‘erupt in large yellow boils’ (*Goblet* 541). Considering the definition of a gift as an object given to establish a social relation, this example represents the extreme anti-gift. It is expressly meant to cause harm to an unsuspecting receiver, based on the giver’s social hostility towards them.

There is another category of gifts which lies between these extreme examples and truly successful gifts. These are objects gifted with sincere, good intention on part of the givers, yet fail to take into account whether they would be welcomed by the ones receiving them. Lavender Brown, who is dating Ron in the sixth book, presents him with a necklace. The intention behind her gifting is sincere, as she wishes to commemorate her love for Ron with a material gift. However, the object in question turns out to be a gold chain with the words ‘my sweetheart’ embossed on it. Despite the sincerity of the giver’s intention, it is her lack of consideration of whether Ron would find wearing such an article embarrassing which renders her gift unsuccessful. Ron dismisses the gift

contemptuously, by wondering, ‘how could she think I’d like something like that’ (*Prince* 222).⁵⁵ A gift given without the consideration of the receiver’s desire is diminished in its efficiency to form reciprocal bonds. ‘The state to which the gift-article is reduced,’ Dilnot argues regarding the gift given without empathy, ‘mimics the generalised loss of a real relation to the subject’ (54).

There is one instance of gift-giving where Hermione’s refusal to acknowledge whether the receiver desires the gift takes on a significant moral connotation. For the category of magical creatures called house-elves, gifts have a fundamental value. They are depicted as humanoid creatures bound to serve wizarding families. The act of gifting them human clothes serves as a magical ritual, which sets them free (Rowling, *Chamber* 133). However, Rowling constructs house-elves as a magical species who actively enjoy serving humans, deriving their own social worth and value from the appreciation of masters. To receive a gift is considered a violent threat in house-elf culture, as they consider being freed of their service not as emancipation, but banishment (*Goblet* 328-333). Hermione refuses to acknowledge this facet of house-elf culture, and imposes her anthropocentric view of freedom on them in claiming that they have been brainwashed into slavery (162). Unsuccessful in convincing the elves of this opinion, she attempts a subterfuge by tricking them into freedom. This trick involves a gift of clothes which the elves expressly do not desire to have.

⁵⁵ Similarly, Hermione tried to impose her academically meticulous values on Harry and Ron without considering what they would like. She gifts them both magical homework planners, which are enchanted to loudly admonish their users if studies are neglected. While she does this because she thinks the boys should be more studious in their examination year, Harry finds the gift exhausting. In an episode, he is portrayed ‘stuffing the homework planner back into his bag and making a mental note to drop it into the fire the first opportunity he got’ (*Phoenix* 541).

“You’re leaving out hats for the house-elves?” said Ron slowly. “And you’re covering them up with rubbish first?”

“Yes,” said Hermione defiantly, swinging her bag on to her back.

“That’s not on,” said Ron angrily. “You’re trying to trick them into picking up the hats. You’re setting them free when they might not want to be free.”

“Of course they want to be free!” said Hermione at once, though her face was turning pink. “Don’t you dare touch those hats, Ron!”

She turned on her heel and left. Ron waited until she had disappeared through the door to the girls’ dormitories, then cleared the rubbish off the woolly hats.

“They should at least see what they’re picking up,” he said firmly (*Phoenix* 230).

Ron’s arguments are presented as the more just of the two children, by depicting an arrogance in Hermione’s vocal claim that she knows what is best for the elves. This impulse to decide *for* the oppressed, rather than acknowledging the latter’s desire, renders her gift not only unsuccessful, but as cruel to house-elves for whom gifts are threats. The moral flaw in Hermione’s insistence on tricking the house-elves lies in her attempt to speak *for* the creatures. From her individual perspective, she sincerely wishes to help a species she believes are oppressed. However, her anthropocentric definition of freedom as a good thing imposes an amount of control over those she claims to be liberating in the first place. While the gift giver’s intention in this case is to provide freedom, the receiver occupies an entirely different stance, where their cultural conception of free life concerns serving magical families. Hermione’s attempted trick of gifting, without acknowledging what the implications of the

gift would be more them, remains an act of epistemic violence (Spivak, “Subaltern” 21-27). In post-colonial critique, Spivak highlights the problems of this impulse by analysing an intellectual elite’s practice of assessing subaltern groups. Such assessment is often carried out according to the perceptions and language of the former, and hence is unable to allow the subaltern to speak for themselves, and bring to the table their alternative notions of values and concepts.⁵⁶ What Hermione fails to assess, then, is that the house-elf’s ‘identity is its difference’ (Spivak, “Subaltern” 27). This difference largely exists in their unique conception of freedom in terms of servility itself. This episode emphasises the moral superiority of an empathetic approach, which acknowledges the gift-receiver’s desires, and accordingly selects the nature of the gift given.

This acknowledgment of the others’ desire is precisely what portrays Harry as a morally commendable character. In giving gifts, he carefully considers what the receiver would want. Harry acknowledges that gifts ‘work not only possessively, for the individual subject who owns them’ (Dilnot 55). In offering a gift which the receiver enjoys, he successfully establishes a social relation of trust. This trust derives from the receiver’s understanding that the giver has given them recognition, and the empathetic commitment necessary to realise what they truly desired. Acknowledgment and empathy open up the space for dialogue, and allows gifts to function ‘dialogically, that is, between

⁵⁶ The problem in Hermione’s behaviour in this case is her attempt to impose her discourse on the subaltern house-elves. If discourse continues to be dominated by the language of the elite, then ‘for the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself’ (Spivak, “Subaltern” 27). Like Spivak’s elites, this is evidenced in Hermione’s recurring argument that the house-elves do not complain about their plight ‘because they are uneducated and brainwashed,’ and her self-prescribed, somewhat evangelising mission to teach them what is best for them (Rowling, *Goblet* 211).

subjects... as a means of establishing concrete relations with the other' (55). Thus, Harry gifts Hermione a copy of *A New Theory of Numerology* (Rowling, *Phoenix* 377), and Ron a Chudley Cannons hat (*Goblet* 409). Neither of these objects mean anything to him; he is neither a Cannons fan, nor does he know Arithmancy. The impulse behind these gifts is guided by his empathetic acknowledgment of the facts that regardless of his own taste, Ron and Hermione are emotionally invested in these subjects. The impact of this thoughtfulness in establishing social relations through happiness and appreciation is evident when Harry offers the quidditch-obsessed Ron a ride on his state of the art broomstick.

“I’m staying out for a bit; Ron wants a go on the Firebolt,” Harry told Wood, and while the rest of the team headed off to the locker rooms, Harry strode over to Ron...“Here you go,” said Harry, handing Ron the Firebolt.

Ron, an expression of ecstasy on his face, mounted the broom and zoomed off into the gathering darkness while Harry walked around the edge of the field, watching him. Night had fallen before Madam Hooch awoke with a start, told Harry and Ron off for not waking her, and insisted that they go back to the castle (*Azkaban* 185).

The importance of acknowledging the desires and opinions of others is offered as the central emotional aspect of Harry’s niceness, which is appreciated consciously by children who receive gifts from him which they enjoy.⁵⁷ Gift

⁵⁷ Hermione reciprocates this model of niceness at one point, which is greatly appreciated by Harry. When he receives a very heavy present from Hermione, he cynically assumes that ‘knowing Hermione, he was sure it would be a large book full of very difficult spells.’ However, his appreciation of Hermione increases deeply when he discovers it is a broomstick servicing kit, an object of great importance for a serious quidditch player like himself (Rowling, *Azkaban* 21). These gifts succeed because their value derives doubly from the receiver’s ability to productively use them, and their appreciation and gratitude which adds to the giver’s social capital.

culture, as depicted in *Harry Potter*, thus portrays social relations and niceness at the heart of individual moral behaviour.

Conclusion

I have analysed how Rowling uses different patterns of collection, as well as different categories of gift giving, to construct moral action in terms of individual social behaviour. The importance of collectibles to everyday social life, as well as the non-monetary circulation of objects as gifts, dissociates individual behaviour from overt economic considerations. This construction is reinforced by the portrayal of foil characters who collect irrationally, or use gifts and social etiquette with specific economic agenda. At the same time, social behaviour is subtly structured as driven by an economic rationale of self-interest, tempered by displays of empathy and acknowledgment, and a refusal to interrogate questions of money. Rowling thus perpetuates the neoliberal ideological construction of social life as predominantly individual action. Such action is dissociated from visible economic interest or overt discussions of money. It offers instead an organic and optimistic vision of individuals forming social relations and acting willingly out of a self-interest which gives them freedom (Sugarman 107-109; Littler 3-8),⁵⁸ By embedding the economic rationale of *homo economicus* in displays of ostensibly organic, social behaviour among communities, the invisible hand which regulates the status quo is largely concealed. Social activity and social relationships are formed on interpersonal, emotional and communal terms, while subtly making the pursuit of social status

⁵⁸ Individual action, governed by a rationale of self-interest, also enforces its own concealment through philanthropic impulses, which effectively silence possible social discourse of the economic basis of such action (Sherman, *Uneasy* 57-144).

and moral authority contingent upon the existence of inevitable underclasses, niceness towards whom defines a person's moral status.

I have interrogated the role of acknowledging the other's desires and voice in displaying this niceness, which Rowling offers as the only model of moral behaviour possible in her neoliberal world. In the final chapter, I analyse displays of this acknowledgement and performative empathy further with regards to two categories of creatures who are not human, but have close and consistent relationships with magical society throughout the books. These creatures are animals as pets, and the house-elves. I analyse the different modes of behaviour characters display around them, ranging from cruelty, to callous paternalism, and empathetic understanding. Analysing these categories of behaviour, and how Rowling presents the differing moral stances they come to stand for, I argue that Rowling's fantasy firmly fixes individualistic acknowledgment and empathy, as markers of how nice a character is, as the only productive mode of moral action in her world. While such empathy is depicted with great narrative optimism and emotionally moving episodes, they perpetuate the problematic neoliberal view of the world as inevitably unequal. This model of moral behaviour denies the possibility of addressing the roots of inequality, which remain hidden by the invisible hand. Instead, it celebrates an individualistic, complacent vision of 'being nice' to one's inferiors as morally sufficient in the contemporary world.

CHAPTER 4: ‘Niceness’ as Sufficient Moral Behaviour: Degrees of Human Empathy for Non-Human Others

Introduction: Chapter Outline

In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated how Rowling constructs her magical world as a hierarchical one. The positions of superiority and inferiority in this world are offered as a common sense reality, fixed in place by an invisible hand of magic. The characters who occupy this world are governed by the individualistic rationale of self-interest. This economic rationale, however, is largely presented as originating from the independent, social behaviour of the characters. As a result, the hegemony which regulates and fixes this rationale for characters to internalise in the first place is kept hidden. I demonstrated how the embedding of economic rationale in fundamentally social behaviour fixes individual action as the sole model of moral behaviour, in turn silencing possible introspections into the hierarchy itself. Rowling’s perpetuation of this model is motivated by the ideology of ‘neoliberalism [as] not so much antisocial as it is privately social, located exclusively in the domain of the interpersonal, apart from public policy and institution’ (Tirado Bramen, 330).¹ In this chapter, I analyse how moral character is established in terms of niceness, portrayed through gestures of empathy and acknowledgment of the voices of inferiors. I

¹ Although the notion of compensatory niceness is sometimes conflated with ‘kindness,’ this is not an accurate correlation. The model of neoliberal moral action in terms of niceness largely displaces the idea of kindness from true, introspective sympathy to a performative gesture of empathy which goes no further than merely acknowledging another individual’s position, and offering token solidarity. (Phillips and Taylor 10-33).

analyse Rowling's portrayal of different degrees of niceness across her moral spectrum, with a focus on the relationship between human characters and their pets, and house-elves. Truly introspective moral behaviour, in the 'privately social' life of the *Harry Potter* books, is displaced by these performative acts of niceness.

Harry, as protagonist, is the moral individual *par excellence*. An innately nice person, his giving of gifts as demonstrated in Chapter 3 forges valuable social relations, offers him authority and status, and resolves resentment between him and his inferiors. The problem in this model of behaviour lies in the fact that 'niceness provides social compensation for deep structural inequalities without ever questioning the source of these inequalities' (Tirado Bramen 336). Rowling's insistence that such behaviour is sufficient for moral life perpetuates a contemporary cultural complacency about what constitutes 'good' action. Harry's niceness, however, is not restricted solely to his sharing of wealth and giving of gifts to peers. A chief aspect of his behaviour expresses itself in his social dialogue; Harry is considered nice because he acknowledges the voices and desires of others in his discourse, instead of imposing his own perception on them. This empathetic model of behaviour, based on a respect for reciprocity, features most prominently in the books when Harry interacts with his 'others' in terms of human/non-human identity.

Texts for children frequently feature non-human and animal companions for the characters, and existing scholarship on the presence of non-human creatures in children's literature offers a variety of perspectives on the role they

play in these narratives.² It is these categories of sentient, magical non-humans who communicate to varying degrees, interact with, and share social lives with humans in the books, that I focus on in my analysis. As I demonstrate, Rowling portrays the degrees of niceness and empathy shown by different humans to their ‘others’ as the main moral markers of their characters. Before I analyse the specific cases of the pets and the house-elves, I demonstrate how Rowling sets out to establish a hierarchical fantasy world where humans, intelligent beings, and mere beasts are fixed in a social order (*Beasts* v-xiv). An identification of what economic and social position owls and house-elves occupy with relation to humans is necessary to investigate how those positions influence and frame moral/immoral behaviour towards them.

4.1. Rowling’s Ecology: The Socially Organised Spectrum of ‘Natural’ Ecology

4.1.1 The Human-Being-Beast Nexus: Treatment of Half-Humans

Rowling populates her magical world with a wide variety of fantastic creatures, some drawn from mythology, and some novel inventions. She consciously structures the social relations between sentient creatures and wizards as a space to raise questions of morals.³ This is evidenced in the first chapter to her 2001

² Critics have considered a number of functions served by animals in texts for young readers. Zoe Jacques, focusing on the theme of posthumanism in children’s books, argues that ‘children’s fiction offers a heretofore neglected resource for understanding cultures of the human and non-human and often questions the nature, parameters and dominion of humanity’ (*Posthuman* 6). Alternately, Tess Cosslett identifies the relevance of ‘representing animals and their relation to human beings’ as crucial to depictions of anthropomorphism in literature (4). Other critical perspectives include ecocritical analysis (Curry, *Earth* 20-67; Dobrin and Kidd 20-88) and the relationships between animals and humans (Myers 23-56; Melson 66-102). It is this last category of criticism that I draw upon most regularly, to demonstrate how Rowling depicts non-human creatures as close companions to humans, and what the social dynamics of their relationships portray about the moral judgment of different wizardly individuals.

³ Most of Rowling’s magical creatures are borrowed from folklore and legends from different geographical and cultural traditions. These include dragons (*Goblet* 99-101), grindylows (*Azkaban* 165), boggarts (120-125), hinkypunks, kappas and red caps (128), hippogriffs (78), basilisks (*Chamber* 296),

spin-off book, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. In a foreword to a catalogue of the different creatures in her books, she narrates a fictional history of separating beasts, or dumb animals, from beings, or ‘a creature worthy of legal rights and a voice in the governance of the magical world’ (x). The issue, she suggests, is resolved in a formal statement that ‘any creature that has sufficient intelligence to understand the laws of the magical community and to bear part of the responsibility in shaping those laws’ shall be considered a sentient, near-human being (xii). What is important to note is that in this magical history, wizards are the ultimate arbiters of classification and judgment concerning what ‘sufficient intelligence’ is. The relationship between her human characters and the non-human beings, therefore, is a fixedly political one. This fixing of a socially organised ‘natural’ order of ecology is the space within which she depicts moral behaviour in terms of the human characters’ treatment towards such non-human beings.⁴

This moral spectrum, as demonstrated earlier, is portrayed in terms of degrees of niceness to others. Mendlesohn identifies this depiction of morality

and phoenixes (159-160). Her depiction of goblins draws upon both physical descriptions of goblins and the industrious, suspicious, cave-dwelling connotations associated with dwarves of 20th century post-Tolkien fantasy (Senior 110-113). Other creatures, such as dementors (*Azkaban* 81) and house-elves (*Chamber* 21-29) are original creations.

⁴ Rowling draws upon the tradition of creating a socially organised ecology of creatures to populate her world from much of the 20th century portal-quest fantasy (literature as well as films). In *Beasts of the Forests: Denizens of the Dark Woods* (2019), Jon Hackett analyses the representations and functions of margin-dwelling non-human creatures in fantasy texts. His analysis ranges from the representation of werewolves (51-63), to nature spirits in Tolkien’s fantasy (133-146), and the historical impact of older genres on modern representations of creatures and their fantastic habitats (1-6). Building on his scholarship, it can be argued that portal quest fantasies not only populate their fantasy world with exotic flora and fauna, but organise them in a spectrum which serves to reinforce and highlight the position and status of the human characters who are surrounded by them. This spectrum can vary from good/evil (Pugh, *Potter* 72-83) wild/domestic, or familiar/uncanny (Cherry, *Creatures* 111-126). Once ideologically fixed, this spectrum appears as a given status quo, reinforced by the image of the ‘natural’ instincts of different creatures. This strategy helps Rowling immutably fix Dementors as purely evil (*Azkaban* 80-83) or unicorns as purely innocent (*Stone* 122). Her ontological fixing of the house-elves as servile, as I shall demonstrate, follows the same strategy of socially organised ecology.

‘where everyone is nice, and tolerant...and where differences are accepted but we all know who is inferior to whom and treat them nicely because they *are* inferior’ (“Crowning” 170). Within this hierarchical ecology, morally repugnant behaviour is generally depicted in terms of human prejudice and cruelty towards beings and beasts. This model takes as a moral starting point the existing classification of who is to be identified as fully human, and who is denied that identity. Rowling avoids depicting this classification as authorised by any recognisable political regime, by claiming ‘there is a continued uncertainty about the classification of a beast’ (Rowling, *Beasts* xiii). Moral lapse is therefore constructed as an abuse *of* existing structures of hierarchy, rather than in any systemically problematic elements *inherent in* such an ecology itself. As discussed in the previous chapters, this is an integral feature of neoliberal hegemony, which claims for itself an immutable status quo.⁵

The status quo of humans surrounded by their ecological ‘others’ is offered as the stage on which displays of morality are played out in terms of prejudice and empathetic niceness. Harry is usually presented as the moral ideal, in his refusal to give into prejudices, acknowledging the voice of the non-human inferiors. Foil characters exhibiting overt cruelty, xenophobia, and bigotry are often utilised to highlight his morality. Hagrid is a frequent site of this moral conflict. The gamekeeper is described as ‘a giant of a man... his face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair’

⁵ Thus, the hierarchical, ladder-like structure of human society (Littler 3-6; Sugarman 107) is replicated in the greater magical ecology of Rowling’s world as well. This hierarchy is portrayed as even more immutable because of the ontological definition of creatures as ‘naturally’ inclined to certain kinds of behaviour.

(Rowling, *Stone* 49). There are elements of the bestial in his description; ‘wild’ is an adjective often used to portray him, and his eyes are compared to beetles.⁶ It is revealed in the fourth book that he is half-human, as his mother was a giant (*Goblet* 427-428). His depiction gets even wilder after this revelation. His condition after a dangerous trek with his wild half-brother, the giant Grawp, is described as distinctly less than human.

Hagrid’s hair was matted with congealed blood, and his left eye had been reduced to a puffy slit amid a mass of purple-and-black bruises. There were many cuts on his face and hands, some of them still bleeding, and he was moving gingerly, which made Harry suspect broken ribs. It was obvious that he had only just got home; a thick black traveling cloak lay over the back of a chair and a haversack large enough to carry several small children leaned against the wall inside the door. Hagrid himself, twice the size of a normal man and three times as broad, was now limping over to the fire. (*Phoenix* 421)

Rowling’s references to the blood and cuts on his face, the haversack which could carry children, and Hagrid’s enormous size are all markers of his non-human heritage. Having described Hagrid thus, she then depicts different modes of behaviour towards him as the moral marker of the characters who exhibit them. Hagrid is set up as visibly and recognisably inferior to fully human members of the community. His fixed inferiority then becomes the site on which moral character is decided by judging who is nice to him, and who is not.

⁶ As the books progress, animal metaphors are used consistently to portray him as dwelling somewhere between humans and non-human beings. He is clearly not a magical creature, but his language is distinctly accented, different from anyone at Hogwarts. He is associated with animals as the gamekeeper, and portrayed in the second book with ‘a wild look in his eyes, his balaclava perched on top of his shaggy black head and the dead rooster still swinging from his hand’ (Rowling, *Chamber* 177).

Harry's niceness towards Hagrid portrays him as morally superior to his peers. When he discovers Hagrid's giant heritage, Harry refuses to acknowledge this information as relevant, asserting 'there's nothing wrong with Hagrid' (*Goblet* 430).⁷ Harry's niceness regarding Hagrid is portrayed as a function of his refusal to be prejudiced against the latter, despite finding out his half-human heritage. His moral superiority is expressed as a paternalistic benevolence (Verreet 95-102), an expression of niceness and tolerance dependent on Hagrid's inferior status in the first place.

This behaviour is contrasted by those of characters like Malfoy and Umbridge. Umbridge is openly bigoted towards Hagrid, and interrupts one of the classes he is teaching to insult him for his half-giant status. This episode demarcates the moral characters from the immoral ones clearly. Umbridge implies that because of his heritage, Hagrid must be a savage, and speaks to him in a deliberately slow fashion to patronise him. Different students occupy different sites on the moral spectrum, portrayed by whether they endorse Umbridge's bullying, resent it, or find it confusing.

"Well, Hagrid," she turned to look up at him again, speaking once more in that loud, slow voice, "...You will receive"— she mimed taking something from the air in front of her —"the results of your inspection" — she pointed at the clipboard — "in ten days' time." She held up ten stubby little fingers, then...she bustled from their midst, leaving Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson in fits of

⁷ Harry's niceness is also dependent on his naivete about wizardly stereotypes. He had the advantage of growing up in a non-magical environment, and had no opportunity to imbibe anti-giant prejudices which even Ron has. Despite deeply caring about Hagrid, Ron is quite perturbed by the information (429).

laughter, Hermione actually shaking with fury, and Neville looking confused and upset. (*Phoenix* 449)

Varying degrees of empathy or apathy towards Hagrid's half-human status are depicted as the markers of the students' moral development. While Hagrid himself fails to interpret Umbridge's subtle prejudices,⁸ in other cases half-human characters internalise the prejudice they receive from other humans. Lupin, a werewolf, is also an excellent teacher who is adored by his students. Nevertheless, he resigns when the news of his affliction is made public by Snape (*Azkaban* 309). Harry's indignant response to his leaving is countered by Lupin himself, who suggests that a werewolf like him does not belong in a school near so many children.

"You're not leaving just because of that!" said Harry.

Lupin smiled wryly.

"This time tomorrow, the owls will start arriving from parents... They will not want a werewolf teaching their children, Harry. And after last night, I see their point. I could have bitten any of you... That must never happen again." (309)

Prejudice, in this case, is ingrained in Lupin's own lack of confidence about his marginal identity. While Harry attempts to provide him moral courage

⁸ As with her tyrannical pedagogy analysed in Chapter 1, Rowling portrays Umbridge's moral undesirability in her visible embrace of the ideologically structured prejudice against giants. While Rowling's ecology is ostensibly structured by human ideology in its distinction between beasts and intelligent beings (*Beasts* x-xii), the roots of this ideology are sublimated in the image of a natural, ecological world. In embodying this ideological stance which directly implies that giants are less intelligent and articulate than humans, Umbridge makes her coercive political stance visible, and is thus denied moral virtue in the narrative (Rowling, *Phoenix* 447-451).

to stay, he rationalises that he is a threat to the safety of others around him, because his affliction ensures that he cannot control his bestial instincts (277).⁹

Other characters can be casually stereotyped for their heritage. In the fourth book, Rowling introduces a magical being called the Veela, who resemble ‘the most beautiful women,’ whose attractiveness magically makes men lose their sanity (*Goblet* 103). Meredith Cherland interprets this as a reductive gender stereotype, similar to the Greek ‘siren story,’ suggesting ‘that girls are alluring and sexual beings are boys better watch out’ (“Girls” 278). This depiction is further complicated when Fleur Delacour, a tournament competitor from France, is revealed to be part-Veela herself (Rowling, *Goblet* 308). Harry chooses to share this information with Ron, and even as a moral person himself, slips into stereotyping. To explain why Ron suddenly felt an urge to ask her out on a date, he presumes Ron’s attraction towards Fleur is chiefly because of her veela identity.

“I don’t know what made me do it!” Ron gasped again. “What was I playing at? There were people — all around — I’ve gone mad — everyone watching! I was just walking past her in the entrance hall — she was standing there talking to Diggory — and it sort of came over me — and I asked her!”

⁹ This episode foreshadows another one in the final book, where Lupin attempts to abandon his pregnant human wife. He claims that his ‘kind don’t usually breed...I knowingly risked passing on my condition to an innocent child.’ He is governed by his self-hatred, as he claims ‘even her own family is disgusted by our marriage’ (*Hallows* 107). It is Harry’s stern advice to him which ultimately persuades him to stay with his wife. Unlike Lupin, who sees himself as a beast, Harry refuses to acknowledge this. His empathetic engagement allows him to see past Lupin’s condition, instead focus on his identity as a father-to-be, convincing him not to ‘abandon your kid to go on an adventure with us’ (108).

“She’s part veela,” said Harry. “You were right — her grandmother was one. It wasn’t your fault, I bet you just walked past when she was turning on the old charm for Diggory and got a blast of it.” (399)

Rowling frequently uses gendered words to describe Fleur chiefly in terms of her guild, charm, and feminine attraction. Even her French name, fleur de la cour, translates into the quite feminine phrase ‘flower of the court.’ Assuming Fleur’s appeal chiefly in stereotyped terms of her heritage further complicates the notion of perceiving her beauty, and slips into this conversation between two otherwise morally good child characters. ‘I think it is important to note that Fleur’s beauty is mentioned frequently,’ Cherland comments, ‘...this may make the subject position she occupies more desirable for girls to take’ (“Girls” 278). Her gender position is further complicated by the assertion that she is the descendant of a creature whose ‘natural’ impulse is that of seduction.

While Hagrid, Lupin, and Fleur are all characters whose part-human nature makes them the loci of moral judgment with regards to how different characters treat them, they function for all practical purposes as human characters. However, there are two creatures in the texts which live in almost constant contact with humans, yet are ontologically non-human; animals as pets, and house-elves. Before analysing how different characters across the moral spectrum treat them, it is necessary to demonstrate the socio-economic functions they carry out for wizardly humans, which complicate and influence human treatment towards them. Pets, in particular owls, are not simply companions to wizards, but are depicted as important assets in the wizarding economy. Their widespread usage in sending messages and delivering items to others gives them

a distinct economic value.¹⁰ It is thus important to demonstrate how their economic activity reveals an intelligence superior to non-magical pets, and makes it possible to have greater emotional interactions with them. Similarly, the house-elves are depicted as ontologically servile and happy to serve, and their fundamental function is portrayed as serving humans tirelessly (Rowling, *Chamber* 21-28). By demonstrating their difference from possible sources in earlier children's literature, I argue that the house-elf provides the site of conflict between two opposing worldviews. On one hand, there is the anthropocentric worldview which regards freedom as sacred, and can be used to interpret house-elves as victims of slavery. On the other, the voice of the house-elves provides their own cultural conception of their freedom, which paradoxically depends on their right to serve wizards. These conflicting worldviews, and how humans approach them, construct the moral ideology of different characters, as I shall discuss in subsequent sections.

The animals which are depicted as pets are all distinctly 'beasts'; cats, owls, toads, snakes, as well as fictional creatures like puffskeins. House-elves on the other hand, are classified as 'beings' because of their ability to understand human language and have a functional intelligence which is depicted as human-like (Rowling, *Beasts* x-xiii). I shall first demonstrate how pets, and owls in particular, are integral parts of wizardly socio-economic life, and how this participation reveals an intelligence which makes it possible to engage with them in terms of empathy and acknowledgment of a reciprocal identity.

¹⁰ Owls function as full-time economic units of the magical economy, as evidenced by their regular service of newspaper delivery (Rowling, *Stone* 55) and carrying messages across long distances (*Phoenix* 122).

Secondly, I move on to analysing the more complex category of house-elves, and demonstrate how their cultural identification of themselves is in direct conflict with the anthropocentric identification they evoke according to human moral standards of 'freedom'. The intelligent identity of pets, and the problematic notion of the house-elves' cultural identity as willing servants, are the two concepts regarding which contrasting behaviours of Rowling's characters are used to define contrasting moralities.

4.1.2 Pets in *Harry Potter*: Functional Intelligence and Social Utility

The image of pets, particularly owls, is central to depictions of wizardly life in *Harry Potter*. Because these pets are depicted as constant companions to the characters, interactions with the pets are often used to portray the social relationship between humans and animals. The depiction of such relationships often reveal the difficulties of balancing one's human identity with the 'ownership' of a non-human who asserts an identity of their own. Erica Fudge comments that the pet can 'be regarded as a creature that simultaneously breaches and solidifies boundaries' (*Pet* 30-31).¹¹ Rowling's pets often literally breach and solidify the boundaries between human and animal identity, as demonstrated in the case of Ron's rat Scabbers. Despite being a pet for 13 years in the Weasley household, Scabbers is revealed in the final chapters of the third book to be a wizard in disguise (Rowling, *Azkaban* 265). This revelation is then portrayed to have been assisted by another pet, Hermione's cat Crookshanks.

¹¹ Fudge's analysis focuses on this dialectic, sometimes discomforting and jarring function of pets in children's literature. Pets function in texts for children, she argues, to complicate the identity of the human characters by asserting their own (30-35).

That the magical cat has far more intelligence than any of the children had suspected is revealed by the complexity of its actions.

“He’s been scared of that mad cat!” said Ron, nodding toward Crookshanks, who was still purring on the bed.

...“This cat isn’t mad,” said Black hoarsely. He reached out a bony hand and stroked Crookshanks’s fluffy head. “He’s the most intelligent of his kind I’ve ever met. He recognized Peter for what he was right away...He tried to bring Peter to me, but couldn’t... so he stole the passwords into Gryffindor Tower for me... As I understand it, he took them from a boy’s bedside table...This cat — Crookshanks, did you call him? — told me Peter had left blood on the sheets... I supposed he bit himself... Well, faking his own death had worked once” (263).

Crookshanks’ intelligence is difficult for the children to believe, and both Ron and Hermione find it very uncomfortable to accept the real status of their pets as more intelligent beings than they had expected.¹² Jacques argues that ‘pets do not always have a comfortable relation with humans in children’s literature,’ and the status of a pet can function in such texts as a ‘frustrating reminder that animal knowledge remains beyond dominion and can teasingly resist human understanding, even when that animal might be nominally understood as a human possession’ (*Posthuman* 73). Pets in Rowling’s books constantly resist being understood as mere human possession by asserting their

¹² Scabbers is revealed to be a disguised human, and Crookshanks portrays near-human intelligence. Not only did the cat have an intuition strong enough to detect Scabbers’ true nature, but also stole passwords, attempted to kidnap the rat, and communicated successfully with a human wizard to bring a criminal to justice. This information is difficult for Harry to believe initially, as his ‘brain seemed to be sagging under the weight of what he was hearing’ (Rowling, *Azkaban* 263).

own identities, quirks, and personalities.¹³ Rowling uses this function of pets to portray how moral different characters are with reference to the varying degrees to which they acknowledge this sovereign identity their pets possess, without considering them mere possessions.

The three most common animals depicted as pets are owls, cats, and toads (Rowling, *Stone* 53). This choice of animals is ostensibly drawn from European cultural traditions, which associated them with witchcraft. Mauss traces the depiction of ‘the sorcerer and his animal counterpart’ (*Magic* 44) to the idea of the duality of a magician’s soul. In this conception, the image of the familiar, or an animal intimately connected to the witch/wizard, is constructed on the notion that ‘a magician’s soul is essentially mobile, easily separated from his body.’ The cultural belief asserts that a part of the magic user’s soul can manifest itself visibly in the form of an animal (42). Rowling ostensibly draws upon the notion of the familiar in her depiction of the Patronus.¹⁴ However, unlike the Patronus, she clearly demarcates pets as autonomous creatures, with an identity independent of the wizard who owns them. This differentiation between owner and pet is a crucial factor for Rowling’s construction of niceness in terms of empathy. Empathy can only be exercised as ‘a similarity or matching

¹³ Other examples of pets exhibiting functional intelligence and asserting their identities are Rowling’s depiction of Hedwig’s occasional refusal to interact with Harry out of resentment at being ignored (*Goblet* 232-238), Pigwidgeon’s excitement and overwhelming pride at his success in delivering posts on time (17), and Fawkes the Phoenix’ miraculous intervention to save Harry’s life from a basilisk (*Chamber* 276).

¹⁴ The Patronus is described to be ‘a guardian which acts as a shield between you and the Dementor,’ and when magically conjured, ‘each one is unique to the wizard who conjures it’ (Rowling, *Azkaban* 176). This unique form takes the shape of an animal, ostensibly of some specific significance to the conjurer. Thus, Snape’s patronus materialises as a doe, a symbol for his lost love, Lily Evans (*Hallows* 551-552).

of numerically *distinct emotions* held individually by *separate persons* who are *ontologically distinct from each other*' (Snow, "Empathy" 67).¹⁵

The intelligence of the pets, as well as their status as separate individuals who function without direct guidance from their human owners, are portrayed in their distinct economic role and social status in magical life. Owls are a particularly common example of the importance of animals in magical economy. Harry first acquires Hedwig, his snowy owl, at Diagon Alley, where he hears 'a low, soft hooting [coming] from a dark shop with a sign saying *Eeylops Owl Emporium -- Tawny, Screech, Barn, Brown, and Snowy*' (Rowling, *Stone* 56). The high social status of owls, compared to other pets, is explained to him by Hagrid. The gamekeeper claims that owls are 'dead useful, carrying yer post an' everythin', as opposed to other animals like toads, which 'went outta fashion years ago,' and shall only draw social ridicule for Harry (62). This economic rationale highlights the owl's social utility in magical life; not only does it function as a companion to Hogwarts students, but also works as a functional unit of the social and economic life of the texts. They are depicted as essential in wizardly communication, since the magical world mistrusts muggle technology, depending almost exclusively on writing letters.¹⁶ Owls also serve in commodity exchange within the wizarding economy, as represented by the

¹⁵ As demonstrated in Chapter 3, Harry's niceness is driven by his individual, expressivist emotional response leading him to help others because it makes him feel good. Such a model of niceness fundamentally depends on a sense of personal empathy, which comprises positive 'emotions elicited by aiming to share the emotions of another' (Kasperbrauer 819). Without an acknowledgment of the independent emotions of another individual, this model of niceness cannot function.

¹⁶ Quicker methods of communication do exist, including the use of floo powder (Rowling, *Goblet* 177) or the Protean charm used by Hermione (*Phoenix* 355). However, owls are portrayed as the most frequent medium of sending messages, certainly among students at Hogwarts, who receive regular owl post (*Stone* 119).

one which delivers the morning newspaper to Hagrid, and displays enough intelligence to pester the humans till they have paid for their paper.

The owl swooped in and dropped the newspaper on top of Hagrid, who didn't wake up. The owl then fluttered onto the floor and began to attack Hagrid's coat...

Harry tried to wave the owl out of the way, but it snapped its beak fiercely at him and carried on savaging the coat.

"Hagrid!" said Harry loudly. "There's an owl —"

"Pay him," Hagrid grunted into the sofa.

"What?"

"He wants payin' fer deliverin' the paper. Look in the pockets" (55).

In providing such regular and reliable service, owls in *Harry Potter* demonstrate a remarkable amount of understanding, intelligence, and personality. The owl that is represented most frequently, Hedwig, is characterised by all these attributes. Rowling claims that 'Harry's owl had never yet failed to deliver a letter to anyone. Even without an address' (*Goblet* 24). Hedwig's independent identity is highlighted by her distinct personality. She is portrayed as particularly proud and dignified, and when Sirius sends letters to Harry carried by 'brightly coloured tropical birds,' it is suggested that she 'had not approved of these flashy intruders; she had been most reluctant to allow them to drink from her water tray before flying off again' (27).¹⁷ The portrayal

¹⁷ This personality sets her apart from other owls Harry encounters. Ron's owl Pigwidgeon, for example, is hyperactive and excitable, and usually zooms around the room excitedly after delivering letters, 'apparently very pleased with itself for accomplishing its task'" (*Azkaban* 315). The Weasley family owl Errol, on the other hand, particularly 'elderly and feeble,' and frequently collapses from exhaustion after

of Hedwig displaying an independent personality reveals her capacity for genuine, vibrant emotional experience. As a psychological process, empathy requires both individuals to be emotional beings; ‘cognitively, we at least have to believe that the other is genuinely experiencing emotion’ (Snow, “Empathy” 71). Because Rowling’s pets display genuine emotional experiences, the characters can be depicted as operating in terms of niceness based on empathy with regards to their pets.

The emotional intelligence of pets, and the possibility of humans forming empathetic attachments with them, sets them apart from the many magical creatures in the books which are guided by their primitive instincts. There is no scope offered in the narratives to morally engage with these creatures, because they are not capable of empathy. Boggarts, for example, prey on peoples’ fears out of a primitive instinct. Since they do not have any intelligence or identity, Rowling makes it perfectly morally acceptable to use a boggart for training in school. When the final student, Neville, casts his spell on the creature, it ‘burst into a thousand tiny wisps of smoke, and was gone’ (Rowling, *Azkaban* 100). Similarly, Dementors are portrayed as guided by a primal hunger for human souls, and it is made clear that ‘it is not in the nature of a Dementor to understand pleading or excuses’ (66). Such creatures, therefore, present no moral aspect to engage with.¹⁸ Pets, however, are distinctly characterised as having individual personalities and identities, capable of feeling

long flights (*Goblet* 28). This depiction of individual owls with their own quirks and emotional preferences makes them suitable candidates for characters to have empathetic relationships with.

¹⁸ Rowling justifies the unhesitant magical belligerence against Dementors and Boggarts through their depiction as primal creatures of evil in her socially organised ecology. In her portrayal, these creatures function in terms of their ‘monstrosity,’ which serves to invoke horror and strengthen the ‘affective investments in the storyworld’ which are ‘often tied up in emotional responses’ (Cherry, *Creatures* 111). Unlike pets or other sentient creatures, these entities exist to be defeated by heroes.

complex emotions, and intelligent enough to communicate with and work alongside humans. This provides the narrative basis for Rowling's characters to demonstrate their moral values with regards to their engagement with pets.

The second category of creatures I analyse are more complex in their construction. Not only do they share the attributes of identity, personality, emotions and intelligence with owls, but are also capable of language and therefore an independent culture. In analysing the house-elves, I demonstrate their cultural opposition to anthropocentric definitions of freedom and sovereignty. This opposition is important to analyse first, as conflicts between these two cultural ideals define the moral character of different humans who treat them differently.

4.1.3 The House-Elves: Freedom as Unfreedom

The house-elves in *Harry Potter* are constructed as creatures characterised by a paradoxical conflation of two concepts; they assert their own freedom in terms of willing, bonded labour for humans. The servility of a house-elf, while perceivable as the opposite of freedom from the anthropocentric perspective, is insisted by elf characters in the books to be the very marker of their sovereignty and happiness. Understandably, this issue has been the subject of analysis in existing scholarship.¹⁹ Karin E. Westman's depiction of the house-elves is

¹⁹ Critical interpretation of house-elves vary among different scholars. Elaine Ostry, for example, believes that they are influenced by a deeply pervasive false consciousness. No matter where they go, this compulsion reminds them they 'must serve someone' (96), a view agreed upon by other critics (Carey, "Hermione" 103-106; Green, "Discrimination" 55-70). A different perspective of the house-elves argue that they represent the optimistic possibility of freedom, and encourages others to introspect about such possibilities (McDaniel 65-89; Kellner 55-87; Howard, "Slaves" 45-87), while another strand of scholarship contends that the elves are, in fact, characterised by a "species-condition of subjectivity" (Gupta 123).

particularly relevant to my argument of the elves' ontological servility, as she contends that they are;

Not only a different species within the wizarding world, but, unlike wizards of mixed blood, goblins, or other species of magical creatures, are born into a servant class...their race determining their class, the house-elves illustrate how one material difference (race) can naturalise another (class) within a society that marks difference and accords power through material signs.

("Thatcherism" 326)

To resolve this paradoxical vision of freedom as unfreedom which house-elves are characterised by, it is necessary to analyse the sources of their depiction. House-elves are described as an anthropoid species, capable of human speech and advanced cognitive and emotional behaviour (Rowling, *Chamber* 21-22). Multiple possible literary sources for this depiction of house-elves can be identified. The folkloric sources of helpful elves secretly assisting with housework is found in numerous sources, categorised as #503 in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index. Emily Strand locates a more specific source in the figure of the *farfadets*; 'wrinkled little humanoids who help around farms by night, wearing dirty rags.' According to folk traditions, these creatures 'are offended enough to quit helping and run off if the humans they assist give them new clothes' ("Dobby" 178). This can be considered a plausible source for the house-elves. The most familiar figure from modern children's literature to resemble the house-elf, however, can be found in the depiction of Dick, a hob or an English spirit who inhabits Widford Manor. However, unlike the house-elves, he remains throughout the novel to be loyal to the house, regardless of whether the tenants are the original royalist inhabitants, or the new puritan

family who replace them. Moreover, he is not servile to the members, and chooses to aid or hinder the humans according to his feelings for them (Briggs, *Hobberdy* 1-208). What sets the house-elves in Rowling's books apart is their conception of service and loyalty to their human masters as the most important and sacred aspect of their identity. Unlike Dick or the *farfadets*, they are bound by a magical contract to obey anything their masters command them to do.²⁰ This ontological identity of servility is the source of the conflicting modes of moral behaviour characters exhibit regarding house-elves.

The house-elves' relationship to wizarding families is depicted as those of servants, rather than slaves; they are crucially depicted as *willing* to serve those families. Like owls, house-elves too are portrayed as important entities in the wizardly economy; not only do they function as domestic helps in private wizarding households, but they are also employed en masse in institutions, such as the castle of Hogwarts where they are responsible for cooking all the food and keeping the school in order (Rowling, *Goblet* 161). They can only be freed through a ritual of being offered clothes. There is no way a house-elf can free herself/himself, and the owner-owned contract can only be terminated at the owner's pleasure (*Chamber* 133). Like the question of the inability of muggles to use magic, the house-elves' willingness to serve wizards is depicted as an ontological, common sense aspect of their identity. Rowling provides neither any background or origin story of how such a servile race came to be. Her

²⁰ That this is a contract, rather than an absolutely fixed ontological compulsion, is evidenced in the books. The unhappiness of Dobby with the treatment he faces at the hands of his family (Rowling, *Chamber* 21-27), and Kreacher's ingenious interpretation of language to deceitfully disobey Sirius' command (*Phoenix* 533) suggest that house-elves may resist their owners' orders. However, in both these cases, the elves are still compelled to be of service to someone, Kreacher to the Black family who he feels Sirius has betrayed (178), and Dobby to Harry, who he sacrifices his own life to save (*Hallows* 417). Elaine Ostry's assessment that they feel a compulsion to serve *someone* can be applied here, to regard the elves as truly having internalised a culture which values service as freedom.

socially organised ecology as a ‘natural’ one offers only the cultural self-identification of house-elves as servile, with no credible alternative knowledge.

In the absence of any explanation, the only mode of analysis possible is to compare what the house-elves claim about themselves, to what anthropocentric views can interpret about this claim.²¹ The conflict between these opposing ideas of freedom influences different patterns of moral behaviour which humans exercise with regard to house-elves in the books. I argue that this conflict is left unresolved at the end of the series for a distinct ideological purpose. The conflict could not possibly be resolved because it would require collective action from humans and house-elves together to address the roots of the hierarchy.²² Since the only mode of moral action offered in the books is individualistic, such collective action is rendered impossible. I argue with reference to Harry’s behaviour in Section 4.3.2 that his moral action is not determined in terms of resolving the conflict. Instead the performative model of niceness is used to diminish resentment and establish a complacent, superficial fellow-feeling among superiors and inferiors. In Rowling’s fantasy, this individualistic mode of action is portrayed as morally sufficient.

²¹ From a postcolonial point of view, this comparison can be used to portray to *what* degree the elves are offered to voice their own concerns, and if there is an effort by characters to override their self-identity with their own anthropocentric discourse. If the house-elf, in its inferior and vulnerable position in magical society, is to be considered a subaltern identity (Spivak 26-28), then its identity is constructed not as an alternative, but in a hierarchical opposition to human identity. This opposition is most clearly visible in the widely different ways in which humans and elves consider ‘freedom’, and this concept thus provides the site on which her human characters portray their moral quality with regards to the degree of empathy they have for the voice of the subaltern (Ambedkar 33-45; Loomba 122-145).

²² This mode of collective action is what B.R. Ambedkar terms ‘collaborative action’ in the context of caste struggle, a mode of dialectical political and social action which functions neither in terms of violence against the upper-caste, nor in recruiting their aid in ‘lifting up’ of the untouchables, but based in a communal project of reorganising political economy (*Annihilation* 81-86). In any conflict between the lower caste and the upper one, individualistic action from any camp proves futile in affecting real change. Rowling’s neoliberal world, fixed immutably by the invisible hand of magic, only offers individualism as the mode of moral action.

Harry's first encounter with a house-elf is through the character of Dobby. He explains to Harry the status of house-elves as servants to magical families, and shows him the material marker of his servitude; the lack of human clothes.

"This, sir?" said Dobby, plucking at the pillowcase. "Tis a mark of the house-elf's enslavement, sir. Dobby can only be freed if his masters present him with clothes, sir. The family is careful not to pass Dobby even a sock, sir, for then he would be free to leave their house forever" (Rowling, *Chamber* 151).

All the house-elves that are introduced in the books, with the lone exception of Dobby, are unified in claiming that their cultural identity depends on their service, and the appreciation of humans impressed with the efficiency of their work. Their willingness to serve wizards is therefore portrayed as 'a species-condition of servility' (Gupta, *Potter* 123), to which Dobby is portrayed as a rare exception or mutation. The happiness and eagerness of house-elves to be servile is portrayed when Harry, Ron, and Hermione enter the kitchen at Hogwarts, and are greeted by them.

At least a hundred little elves were standing around the kitchen, beaming, bowing, and curtsying as Dobby led Harry past them...about six house-elves came trotting up behind him, bearing a large silver tray laden with a teapot, cups for Harry, Ron, and Hermione, a milk jug and a large plate of biscuits.

'Good service!' Ron said, in an impressed voice. Hermione frowned at him, but the elves all looked delighted; they bowed very low and retreated (Rowling, *Goblet* 328-329).

The house-elves thus share a common cultural ‘belief that they serve their masters out of tradition’ (Green, “Discrimination”). This depiction of the house-elves, who are delighted when Ron praises their service, portrays the paradox of freedom and slavery that characterises them. Even if elves *are* enslaved, as Hermione is lieve in this scene, it is suggested that they are inherently happy to be in such a position. Being offered freedom through the ritual of clothes-giving is overtly depicted as a source of great pain and terror, rather than emancipation, for house-elves in the books. Paradoxically, therefore, disobedience to the master in elves is punished with freedom. The ambiguity of whether it is moral to liberate those who do not wish to be liberated is portrayed in detail when the children witness the suffering a house-elf goes through at the point of freedom.

“...Winky has behaved tonight in a manner I would not have believed possible,” he said slowly... *This means clothes.*”

“No!” shrieked Winky, prostrating herself at Mr Crouch’s feet. “No, master! Not clothes, not clothes!”

Harry knew that the only way to turn a house-elf free was to present it with proper garments. It was pitiful to see the way Winky clutched at her tea towel as she sobbed over Mr Crouch’s feet. (Rowling, *Goblet* 124)

Winky’s terror at the prospect of being freed suggests that the house-elf conceives of her freedom or sovereignty as her ability to be bonded to the human master, and be of service. If the house-elves’ conception of their own cultural identity is to be considered sincere, then offering them freedom would

work against their interest. Even Dobby, who loves freedom so much that his peers are somewhat embarrassed of him (330), is not entirely free of this cultural compulsion. Rowling portrays him as enjoying his liberty, wearing as many articles of clothing as he can, and endorsing the privileges of freedom to his comrades (327-335). Yet his insistence on being free is undercut by his subsequent employment at Hogwarts; he cannot stay without working somewhere for too long.²³ His new identity at Hogwarts is still constructed in terms of service, and now he suffers significant social disapproval from his kin. ‘Like Caliban,’ Elaine Ostry argues, ‘it seems he must serve someone’ (Ostry, “Mudbloods” 96). This compulsion leads him to loyally serve Harry, often with a fanatical zeal, even as a free elf (Rowling, *Prince* 311-326).

The internalised, almost pathological, dependence of house-elves on the ability to serve their family is portrayed most clearly through Winky’s mental breakdown. She becomes a morbidly depressed alcoholic and nearly drinks and grieves herself to death (Rowling, *Goblet* 328-335). ‘House-elves is not supposed to be having fun, Harry Potter,’ Winky tells the young wizard, ‘House-elves does what they is told’ (90). Winky’s gender, as opposed to Dobby’s, provides an additional layer to her characterisation as psychologically incapable to cope with freedom. While Dobby, the male house-elf, enlists Harry’s help to get liberated and has a number of adventures, Winky’s mental enslavement suggests the metaphor of the enslaved house-elf may be a gendered

²³ In this regard, Dobby does insist that his freedom lies in being able to choose who he works for. However, while his kind and humorous Dumbledore employer provides a moral foil to his previous owners, the cruel Malfoys, Dobby still cannot conceive of a life without service itself. He receives ‘a Galleon a week and one day off a month’ from Dumbledore, while the other elves treat his demand for payment ‘as though Dobby had said something rude and embarrassing’ (330). This collective insult the elves feel at Dobby’s suggestion of payment demonstrates that servitude and labour for their human masters is not only a cultural identity for these creatures, but a deeply cherished one which they hold in reasonably high esteem.

one. Some feminist scholarship has suggested that house-elves in the books represent “‘unliberated’ women, shackled by the chains of tradition to a circumscribed role in the domestic sphere’ (McDaniel 65, Kellner). Winky’s maternal affection for the same master who has cruelly abandoned her certainly supports Brycchan Carey’s assessment of that ‘even when freed, or acting alone, the elves continue to follow their internalised logic of bondage, enslaved by what William Blake called ‘the mind-forg’d manacles’” (“Hermione” 104). Her continued affection for her lost family continues to torment her.

“Oh you is a bad elf, Dobby!” moaned Winky, tears leaking down her face once more. “My poor Mr. Crouch, what is he doing without Winky? He is needing me, he is needing my help! I is looking after the Crouches all my life, and my mother is doing it before me, and my grandmother is doing it before her . . . oh what is they saying if they knew Winky was freed? Oh the shame, the shame!”

She buried her face in her skirt again and bawled. (Rowling, *Goblet* 581)

Ostry argues that through this depiction of house-elves, Rowling attempts to familiarise her child readers with the popular rhetoric often employed in narratives of slavery and racial superiority, and she ‘is particularly sophisticated in this aim with her depiction of elves distressed by the prospect of freedom, illustrating the depth of false consciousness in elf culture’ (“Mudbloods” 96). Other scholars agree with this perspective, arguing that while nothing changes regarding the house-elves’ status at the end of the series, their depiction serves to inspire an effort to ‘understand the inequalities in their world and rectify them’ (McDaniel 89). I argue that unequivocally identifying

the house-elves' voluntary will to serve as false consciousness does not come without its problems.²⁴ This perspective would involve taking the diametrically opposite stand to their self-identification, the anthropocentric perspective.

From an anthropocentric perspective, certain troubling interpretations of the house-elf identity can be identified with regards to issues of race and slavery. While Rowling depicts the house-elves as a non-human species, her depiction of the creatures as humanoid and infantilised raises questions of possible allusions of race. The rhetoric of racial superiority, particularly in terms of racial politics, often deliberately merges the boundary between race and species. This is based on the ideology that particular communities intrinsically possess more intelligence, sophistication and power than others by virtue of their racial identity. The divisive political rhetoric of racism, over different periods of time and different regimes, has been marked by a frequent reference to members of a presumed inferior race as animals, pests or vermin.²⁵ Diminutive and meek, they are infantilised in their unsophisticated grasp over the English language, and their compulsive willingness to serve happily have been interpreted by critics as the re-enactment of 'plantation fantasy' (Green, "Discrimination" 40). Ostry identifies these patterns of language as similar to those 'whites have historically used to depersonalise and infantilise African Americans' (96). The economic system by which house-elves are assigned to

²⁴ Indeed, claiming those who assert a particular cultural identity as a false consciousness which the world must 'rectify' (McDaniel 89), or to deny them their voice in branding them as slaves (Howard, "Slaves" 45-87) is troublingly guilty of epistemic violence (Spivak 26). Since the elves assert their self-identity clearly in intelligible language, the anthropocentric perspective in Rowling's books can only interpret or enter into a dialogue with the 'other,' not impose their own discourse on them. As I shall demonstrate later in this section, this imposition is what earns Hermione the anger and bitterness of the elves she tries to rectify out of their perceived slavery.

²⁵ Jorge Ramos' 2017 documentary, *Hate Rising*, reveals the endemic prevalence of dehumanising language, particularly in populist and reactionary politics, in American as well as European popular culture (Tambini 1:03:37-1:17:20).

magical families, of course, is dissociated from any resemblance to the selling of slaves at the market. They are not sold as commodities, in the way pets are. Instead, as Kreacher's account suggests, they are bound to wizarding families, serving them over generations (Rowling, *Phoenix* 175). However, the legal and societal definitions of slavery have evolved in contemporary society, and must be taken into account in this regard. From the anthropocentric perspective, the house-elves' inability to leave service without the express permission of the master is resonant with contemporary forms of slavery.²⁶

Hermione's indignance at Hogwarts being run by 'slave labour' is based on this anthropocentric assessment of the house-elves' condition (Rowling, *Goblet* 182). However, there is no evidence that the elves themselves consider their condition as akin to slavery, and adult voices of authority largely ignore Hermione's allegations (226). In the absence of any canonical confirmation of slavery, complicated by the robust claim of house-elves themselves that they are willing servants, the question of slavery remains unanswered. This is the issue that remains suspended at the heart of a conflict between anthropological and house-elf ideologies of freedom and paid labour. Hermione finds out how intensely the house-elves disagree with her in an episode where she visits the kitchen.

²⁶ Denying an employee the right to terminate their professional contract is one of the most common forms of contemporary slavery. Contemporary human rights organisations have been busy with investigations into slavery and labour abuse in the Middle-East. A growing number of migrant workers to the countries there have had 'their passport and travel documents...confiscated, so that they cannot leave the country unexpectedly. This has led to forced labour situations' (Khan, "FIFA" 52) Similar accounts of forced labour and slavery have permeated popular political discourses in a variety of geographical regions. The common factor in these issues has been the labourer being subjected to enslavement through a denial of opportunity to leave or exit the hierarchical zone of her/his exploitation (Chauhan 113-148, Rogaly, "Migrant" 66-89).

“Oh for heaven’s sake!” Hermione cried. “Listen to me, all of you! You’ve got just as much right as wizards to be unhappy! You’ve got the right to wages and holidays and proper clothes, you don’t have to do everything you’re told...”

The cheery smiles had vanished from the faces of the house-elves around the kitchen. They were suddenly looking at Hermione as though she were mad and dangerous (Rowling, *Goblet* 352).

Hermione’s effort to strong-arm the house-elves, however well-intentioned, backfires as she ends up insulting them. The offence that she causes is severe enough for the usually servile and meek creatures to physically drag her out of the kitchen (352). Despite this failure to convince the house-elves, Susan Howard contends that Hermione’s quest is not entirely unsuccessful. It is validated by her ability to influence the behaviour of those around her. The motive of her quest, Howard argues, is not for the actual benefit of the house-elves themselves, but to ‘convince an audience of the evils of slavery and the necessity of ending it’ (“Slaves” 37). However, Howard’s argument falls into the same moral paradox I demonstrated earlier with regard to the conflict between the anthropocentric and non-human perspectives. Hermione certainly influences the behaviour of people around her, as I demonstrate in Section 4.2.2. However, even if she were to succeed in convincing people of the necessity to end house-elf slavery, the fundamental issue that house-elves *themselves* do not consider themselves enslaved remains unresolved.²⁷

²⁷ Howard’s argument is applicable in the sense that attitudes towards house-elves *within* her human circle certainly improve when Hermione’s is around. This is the moral position that Harry takes, and is lauded in the narrative for it. Like Hermione, he is kind to house-elves (Rowling, *Goblet* 332). However, unlike her, he is reluctant to challenge the elves’ own perception of themselves and condemn them for not knowing what is best for them (352). He is the perfect neoliberal moral candidate, one whose mode of individual niceness is regulated by a perception of the world and its hierarchies as essentially unchanging and immutable.

The neoliberal principle of individual autonomy, which informs the books, offers an answer to *why* this issue has to remain unresolved. Neoliberal governmentality is committed to ‘protect individual liberty *without dictating* the goals and purposes espoused by *free people*’ (Christman, “Freedom” 343, emphasis mine). The onus remains on human actors to respect the autonomy of house-elves to choose for themselves. The possibility of moral action towards the elves thus remains fixed within the normative human/house-elf hierarchy. As with pets, the moral course of action seems to be an acknowledgment of their individual emotional intelligence and ability to assert an identity independent of anthropocentric impositions.

Having established how both house-elves and pets are portrayed as ideal candidates for the exercise of empathy, I now demonstrate how different degrees of niceness, through this empathetic engagement, demarcate characters on different positions along the moral spectrum. I begin at the negative end of the spectrum, and shall demonstrate in the next section what comprises undesirable moral behaviour concerning these creatures. The more overtly evil characters exploit and torture them, and depict as foil a deeply cruel worldview which represents everything Harry and his peers are fighting against. Another mode of behaviour is not intentionally evil, but somewhat callous, dismissive, and patronising of creatures. The relationship of different children around pets, as well as a number of different ideological stances regarding the house-elf’s servile status, portrays all of these modes of behaviour as ultimately lacking empathy. Having established these different modes of behaviour, I shall analyse in the final section Harry’s relationship with house-elves, and with his owl Hedwig, to demonstrate that his empathetic acknowledgment of their identity

serves to portray his behaviour as morally sufficient. At the same time, his lack of engagement with the roots of the human/non-human hierarchy is notable in his individualistic treatment of them. Such treatment is presented as emotional rather than critical. The portrayal of both Hedwig and Dobby dying fighting his battles, in the final book, reveals the problematic complacency in portraying this niceness as a morally sufficient model.

4.2. Undesirable Behaviour: Cruelty, Callousness, Epistemic Violence

Both house-elves and the pets are portrayed in terms of their autonomous, independent identities. Rowling depicts moral action in terms of empathy; an attempt to acknowledge the identity of the ‘other’ in its own rights. As moral foils, she portrays characters, either evil or indifferently callous, who fail to acknowledge this reciprocal identity. Their moral failure is expressed in terms of prejudice, prevalent in wizardly society.²⁸ Moral responsibility in avoiding this prejudice is depicted in terms of resisting a purely anthropocentric view of the world. For example, in Voldemort’s consideration of anyone not of pure blood as sub-human (Rowling, *Hallows* 17-18), he displays a moral prejudice in refusing to acknowledge the identity of entire communities. Rowling insists that real, harmful prejudice is restricted to a minority of the magical community, like the ‘extremists who campaign for the classification of Muggles as “beasts”’ (*Beasts* xiii). However anthropocentric prejudice exists among both evil and indifferent or otherwise good characters. Jacques comments on a particular

²⁸ Adam Adatto Sandell analyses what the implications of prejudice is on political culture, because ‘prejudice is indeed an indispensable feature of judgment’ (*Prejudice* 225). Rowling depicts different levels of prejudice among her characters, and portrays morally desirable behaviour as attempts to resist and unlearn personal prejudices. As I demonstrate in this chapter, prejudice is depicted not as a single, discernible mode of behaviour, but a wide spectrum of positions different characters take regarding non-human companions.

episode in *Harry Potter*, where Dumbledore discusses the case of the house-elf (Prince 54-56). She analyses the wizard's perspective as 'overtly anthropocentric,' where 'the creature gains importance here *only* in relation to the post-Enlightenment body of the human, who stands as the point of reference in debates about how other beings should be treated' (*Posthuman* 27). Denying one's human identity as the sole point of reference, and allowing the 'other' to speak, is portrayed as the most ideal model of moral behaviour. Such a model is what Rowling portrays Harry as following, in terms of niceness.

Niceness, in turn, is dependent on empathetic engagement, which requires a consideration of the other as subject in the other's own rights, and the 'plurality' of identity, a term employed by Jacques Derrida ("Animal" 17-29). Those who fail to do this in the books are portrayed as morally undesirable. However, there are two categories of intention behind the failure to achieve empathy, and these categories separate the morally evil characters from the indifferent but callous characters who are capable of learning. The first group actively chooses to deny the identity of the other, and imposes their anthropocentric definitions on them as an act of totalising supremacy. This rationale is guided by narcissism, and is portrayed by Rowling as morally reprehensible. As discussed with relation to Voldemort's evil in Chapter 2, any attempt to totalise control over the existing status quo is portrayed as a threat, because it disbalances the more efficient mode of hegemonic control. Voldemort's overt narcissism about non-human creatures is similarly condemned. Compared to narcissism, those who are callous towards non-humans are usually portrayed as capable of learning. Their failure to acknowledge the plurality of the other is shown to be a result of ignorance or

internalised prejudices. The improvement of such characters regarding their behaviour provides an optimistic image of learning. I shall analyse the rationale behind both categories of behaviour, and demonstrate how Rowling structures them as undesirable.

4.2.1 The Figures of Evil: Abuse and Narcissistic Control

Rowling portrays the prejudice of characters like the Death Eaters as the ‘real’ evil. As the Dark Lord of genre fantasy, Voldemort and his followers threaten ‘the wounding of the land,’ a part of the ‘ritual of desecration’ that disbalances the status quo which holds the society in place (Clute and Grant 250). The insistence that house-elves are mistreated in the present, but would be far worse off under the older regime of the Death Eaters is narrated by Dobby.

“Dobby remembers how it was when He Who Must Not Be Named was at the height of his powers, sir! We house-elves were treated like vermin, sir! Of course, Dobby is still treated like that, sir,’ he admitted, drying his face on the pillowcase. ‘But mostly, sir, life has improved for my kind since you triumphed over He Who Must Not Be Named...Harry Potter shone like a beacon of hope for those of us who thought the dark days would never end, sir” (Rowling, *Chamber* 133-134).

Rowling insists on the moral superiority of the present day magical society, as compared to the previous regime. This comprises a narrative strategy which assures both ends of the hierarchy that the current status quo is far more beneficial than previous ones, and should thus be perpetuated in an optimistic vision of a better future (Gounari 210-211).²⁹ Ideologically, this strategy is

²⁹ This political rhetoric is one of populism, and is employed to divert public affective resentment and anger towards an imagined past which, if it were to return, is claimed would bring far more misery than

informed by the cultural optimism in late 1990s UK about New Labour's initial administration. As the economy strengthened, and the UK avoided the early 2000s global recession, Prime Minister Tony Blair's political rhetoric of the 'third way' gained traction. In this rhetoric, his administration celebrated success while distancing themselves from 'the old order, those forces of conservatism,' who 'held people back. They kept people down. They stunted people's potential. Year after year.'³⁰ Rowling's strategy of holding up the past regime as a foil in retrospect, and threatening its return as an incentive to the present state of things, employs a very similar rhetoric. This strategy presents the current status quo, despite any discernible flaws, as an improvement over the dark past.

The threat of returning violence from the dark past manifests itself in increasingly grim images in the later books. Because the Dark Lord 'is frequently rooted in whatever religious or political figures happened to be worrying readers at the time' (Clute and Grant 250), the violence represented by Voldemort and his followers transform into images of religious fundamentalism and torture of the perceived 'others' in the early 2000s. During the growing threat of religious terrorism, leading up to the 9/11 attacks, Voldemort's 'wounding of the land' (250) is portrayed in the form of his extension of narcissistic prejudice not only towards non-human house-elves, but muggles,

the current regime (Lowenthal and Guterman 166-194). This rhetoric gained popularity during the early days of neoliberalism with Ronald Reagan's incitement of the already endemic "Red Scare" myth regarding the USSR in the US (Mitra 55-89), or Thatcher's "there is no alternative" rhetoric, and only continues to gain popular traction in global populism.

³⁰ This rhetoric continued to dominate the Blair administration's public pronouncements, being utilised effectively in electoral politics as well (Blair, "e-Archives").

who he considers no more than beasts. In the fourth book, Rowling portrays for the first time the visible horror of the torture of muggles by dark wizards.

A crowd of wizards, tightly packed and moving together with wands pointing straight upward, was marching slowly across the field... their heads were hooded and their faces masked. High above them, floating along in midair, four struggling figures were being contorted into grotesque shapes. It was as though the masked wizards on the ground were puppeteers, and the people above them were marionettes operated by invisible strings that rose from the wands into the air. Two of the figures were very small (Rowling, *Goblet* 120).

These scenes of cruelty reinforce the intensity of the threat posed by Death Eaters who do not acknowledge the human identity of muggles, motivated by a narcissistic supremacy. Mr. Weasley later explains to Harry that this torture was ‘their idea of fun. Half the Muggle killings back when You-Know-Who was in power were done for fun’ (143). The threat of Voldemort’s return is heightened by this visual image, and the ideological suggestion in this episode is that the torturous past is once again threatening a return, against which the existing status quo must be protected. This narcissistic cruelty against muggles functions in terms of the Death Eaters’ consideration of the wizard/muggle hierarchy as a binary. As Sen argues, the notion of the binary dominates political rhetorics of divisiveness, assuming ‘a ‘solitarist’ approach to human identity, which sees human beings as members of exactly one group’ (*Violence* 45-46). Sen’s argument is, of course, about ‘human identity,’ and the house-elves are constructed as non-human, though anthropoid. The assumptions and beliefs underlying the prejudice which leads to such wanton cruelty are

driven by this reduction of the ‘other’s’ identity to ‘member(s) of exactly one group’ (46).

The Death Eaters do not consider the muggles as worthy of respect, decent treatment, or justice, because they do not consider their human identity as worthy. The muggles are reduced in their narcissistic ideology to members of exactly one group; a group who do not possess magical ability. Devoid of the only mode of power they respect, the muggles are thus reduced to mere beasts to torture with impunity. With the house-elves as well, we see Death Eaters like Lucius Malfoy exercising cruelty as a reminder that they do not consider these creatures worthy of human decency.

“We’re going, Dobby!”

He wrenched open the door, and as the elf came hurrying up to him, he kicked him right through it. They could hear Dobby squealing with pain all the way along the corridor (Rowling, *Chamber* 247-248).

Lucius’ act of needless violence is governed by his refusal to acknowledge Dobby’s identity as a being capable of feeling pain. He exercises violence to assert his power over Dobby as a mere object he possesses. The solitarist approach towards one’s inferiors (Sen, *Violence* 45) denies the latter any independent identity, thereby foreclosing the possibility of empathetic engagement. The only mode of behaviour this approach inspires is narcissistic possession.

This relentless compulsion of narcissism to possess and own is portrayed in its most pathological and extreme form in the behaviour of Voldemort. Rowling often employs the serpent motif to represent evil characters who

symbolise death and violence (Berner and Millman 69). Voldemort is fittingly accompanied by his pet, a giant snake called Nagini. She is first introduced in the fourth book, as ‘a gigantic snake, at least twelve feet long’ (Rowling, *Goblet* 17). While owls serve wizards the utilitarian purpose of carrying letters, Voldemort’s dependence on Nagini is revealed to be far more primal. Voldemort is still very weak in the book, and Nagini’s milk keeps him alive. This sustenance is crucial for him if he is to be ultimately resurrected (14). Lauren Berman argues that this depiction of Nagini ‘is a distorted version of the Egyptian cobra goddess, Renenutet, whose name means ‘the provider of nourishment’” (“Serpents” 52).³¹ Nagini is a female serpent, her name being the feminine form of the Sanskrit word for snake (*naga*). Rowling portrays the image of Voldemort staying alive by feeding on her milk as a grotesque caricature of the mother-son relationship. A possible influence on Rowling’s portrayal may have been the Lady of the Green Kirtle from C.S. Lewis’ *The Silver Chair*. The lady, who can transform into a giant green snake (Lewis, *Chair* 57), kills the queen of Narnia and kidnaps her son, Rilian. She then keeps Rilian under an enchantment and presents him as her protegee. In both cases, there is an image of toxic, coerced dependency.³²

Voldemort’s dependency on Nagini is later revealed to be far greater than mere sustenance on her milk. In *The Half-Blood Prince*, Nagini is a

³¹ In ancient Egyptian mythology, Renenunet was the nourisher of the god Nepri, later identified with the king of the deities, Osiris (Watterson 97). Voldemort’s relationship with Nagini, who similarly nourishes him and grants him eternal life, can be read as a grotesque adaptation of this mythic narrative. Voldemort too wishes to acquire god-like power, but unlike Osiris, he wields it to destroy the existing status quo, not guard it as its rightful king.

³² This caricature can also function as a foil to Voldemort’s nemesis, Harry. While both Harry and Voldemort were orphaned at birth, Harry’s warm and optimistic induction into the adoptive family, with Molly Weasley guarding him as a maternal figure (Mauk 66) is starkly contrasted with Voldemort’s disturbing, obsessive relationship with Nagini for sustenance.

horcrux, an object into which a wizard has magically preserved a part of his soul to render himself partially immortal (473). Voldemort's narcissistic possession of his snake is revealed in its most extreme form in this revelation; not only is he completely unconcerned about Nagini's independent identity, but has quite literally obliterated her status as an autonomous individual. He achieves this by placing a portion of his own soul into her material body, transforming her into a mere extension of himself. John Berger, drawing on existing psychoanalytic criticism, argues that this process of obliteration of the pet's subjectivity establishes a relationship of complete ownership; 'the pet[s]... are creatures of their owner's way of life' (*Animals* 24-25).³³ Rowling condemns such action in the texts as dangerous and undesirable; 'to confide a part of your soul to something that can think and move for itself is obviously a very risky business' (*Prince* 473). She portrays Voldemort's interaction with Nagini using ominous language and imagery, suggesting that something is deeply wrong about this companionship.

The soft voice seemed to hiss on even after [Voldemort's] cruel mouth had stopped moving. One or two of the wizards barely repressed a shudder as the hissing grew louder; something heavy could be heard sliding across the floor beneath the table.

The huge snake emerged to climb slowly up Voldemort's chair. It rose, seemingly endlessly, and came to rest across Voldemort's shoulders: its neck the thickness of a man's thigh; its eyes, with their vertical slits for

³³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe this psychoanalytical process as 'becoming intense, becoming animal'; narcissistic possession entails not the mere ownership of the animal, but the transformation of it into an extension of one's identity (254-282). Rowling uses the metaphor of magic to literalise this transformation in case of Nagini as a horcrux.

pupils, unblinking. Voldemort stroked the creature absently with long, thin fingers, still looking at Lucius Malfoy (*Hallows* 15).

The choice of the images and language in these paragraphs suggest that there is something uneasy and morally wrong about Voldemort's bond with his snake. It is his narcissistic denial of Nagini's individual identity in her own right that demarcates his moral undesirability.³⁴ This narcissism prevents him from exercising true empathy. He belongs to the category of individuals 'so concerned with themselves, as a result of their emotional development, that they view others only in relation to their own needs and satisfaction' (Moses, "Empathy" 139).

Voldemort's prejudice towards anyone other than his own self, of course, represents an extreme moral position in the books, depicted by Rowling in terms of his obsessive narcissism. The next section analyses characters like Ron, Hermione and Neville in the books who also fail to acknowledge the independence of identity which non-humans possess, thereby exhibiting degrees of prejudice. Unlike Voldemort and his supporters, however, they are not depicted as narcissistic. Instead, their behaviour is influenced by casual prejudice, or an excessively anthropocentric worldview. Such characters exhibit behaviour which, while undesirable, can improve by unlearning prejudices and becoming more empathetic. In the following section, I analyse how Rowling

³⁴ Voldemort's magical transformation of Nagini into a mere extension of his own self functions denies her an ontologically distinct identity. As a narcissist, he is unable to comprehend any notion of 'good' beyond his own identity. Only when it is revealed to him that his life would be threatened if the snake was destroyed does he decide that 'Nagini...must remain close now, no longer sent to do his bidding, under his protection' (Rowling, *Hallows* 444).

shows even good characters slipping up in their moral judgment, and learning to exercise empathy better.

4.2.2 Casual Prejudice: Callousness and Epistemic Violence

Empathy, in terms of acknowledging the non-human other's independent identity, is portrayed by Rowling as the most suitable moral instrument to avoid narcissistic possession. Caring for pets is depicted in the texts as 'an act of engagement with another person, rather than a description of personal traits' (Phillips, "Empathy" 46). This engagement, however, is a learning process which characters slowly train themselves in. Some of the characters, while well-meaning in their intentions, often stumble to acknowledge the autonomy of their pets. The most common examples of this behavior are Ron and Hermione's treatment of their pets which causes much of the tension in their friendship. This tension comes to a climax with Hermione's cat allegedly killing Ron's rat, and the narrative depicts the potential 'end of Ron and Hermione's friendship' in terms of their accusations regarding each other's treatment of their animals.

Ron was enraged that Hermione had never taken Crookshank's attempts to eat Scabbers seriously, hadn't bothered to keep a close watch on him and was still trying to pretend that Crookshanks was innocent by suggesting Ron look for Scabbers under all the boys' beds. Hermione, meanwhile, maintained fiercely that Ron had no proof that Crookshanks had eaten Scabbers, that the ginger hairs might have been there since Christmas (Rowling, *Azkaban* 287).

The narrative depicts the children's conflict in terms of perceived lapses in their responsible treatment of pets; alleged callousness and lack of discipline on Hermione's part, and holding a grudge on Ron's. Similarly, Neville's

irresponsibility in constantly misplacing his toad Trevor, is depicted through the comical, bumbling figure of Neville who cannot prevent his pet from wandering off on its own (*Stone* 71). These lapses of judgment, however, are depicted as learning curves. Ron and Hermione's conflict is resolved when both of them discover more about their pets, evidenced especially in Ron's acceptance of Crookshanks as a responsible, intelligent animal (*Azkaban* 316). Rowling portrays through these narratives of maturity an optimistic, active image of empathy. These images insist it is possible to learn to be more empathetic, and thereby exercise niceness towards others. Niceness, as a model of moral behaviour, is thus constructed in the texts as a necessarily balanced mode of action, which emphasises the need for care and responsibility for an inferior, while acknowledging the latter's own autonomy and subjective identity. As Jacques comments, although 'the comfortable nature of pets, and the special relationship often represented between pets and young people in children's literature, would seem on the surface to be immune to some of the complexities of human-animal ontology,' they remain complicated creatures which 'are commoditised and located as lower than humans within normative hierarchies of being' (*Posthuman* 70-75).

These fixed normative hierarchies, where animals and non-humans are always located lower than the humans, inspire the occasional complacency among well-meaning characters. Because the pets and house-elves are inferior to wizards, even good characters are sometimes guilty of imposing anthropocentric prejudices onto them. The narrative depicts this tendency in Ron's use of house-elves as a metaphor for forced, hard work, when he laments that working hard for his brother's wedding is 'like being a house-elf... Except without the job

satisfaction' (Rowling, *Hallows* 91).³⁵ This prejudice originates from a solitarist view of the house-elf as solely a servile entity, rather than an individual subject with an identity as independent and multivalent as humans. To prevent lapsing into Solitarism, Sen advocates 'a clearer understanding of the pluralities of...identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division' (*Violence* 72). Rowling's insistence on empathy as the fundamental driving force behind niceness is based on this acknowledgment of plurality. Breaking down the prejudice of lumping all house-elves together as happy slaves opens up the ground for empathy, and subsequently acts of niceness which take into consideration what the elves think of their own selves, rather than anthropocentric ideas about them. This mode of behaviour allows the house-elf his/her voice to speak, thus leading to the recognition that Dobby, Winky, or Kreacher all have their own personalities, histories, and unique experiences.

The initial reluctance on the part of characters like Ron to take accountability for their prejudice is based on a certain anxiety about the self. When Hermione begins to berate Ron by saying 'it's people like you...who prop up rotten and unjust systems,' (125) Harry quickly changes the conversation. Acknowledging that the same solitarist prejudice drives Ron's casual stereotyping and the Death Eaters' cruelty is accompanied by a fear of recognising the potential for evil within one's own behaviour. 'Those fighting

³⁵ A similar error in judgment leads Ron to claim that house-elves probably '*like* being enslaved' (Rowling, *Goblet* 198), and Hagrid supports him by saying that 'it's in their nature ter look after humans' (233). Both Ron and Hagrid are guilty of solitarism; through their anthropocentric identification of house-elves in terms of their servility alone, they reduce all house-elves to one single category, excluding independent exceptions like Dobby.

[extremism],’ Ashis Nandy argues, ‘fear that any humane treatment of the subjectivities associated with such extremism will only acknowledge the humanity of the enemy and legitimise its politics’ (*Regimes* 24). Rather than comprehending or even acknowledging the roots of racist or prejudiced belief systems, the concern of much contemporary political discourse lies in absolutely alienating the enemy with respect to the perceived sense of ‘self.’ Underlying this tendency, Nandy identifies a deep-seated, ‘unacknowledged fear...that the enemy may not turn out to be an alien, infra-human species, but a dangerous human potentiality within everyone’ (*Regimes* 24). Yet, acknowledging one’s own prejudice is the first step towards empathetic action, and Rowling provides an optimistic character arc for Ron. She completes his arc of maturity by framing it within the emotionally charged depiction of Hermione and Ron finally confessing their love for each other.

““Hang on a moment!” said Ron sharply, “We’ve forgotten someone!”

“Who?” asked Hermione.

“The house-elves, they’ll all be down in the kitchen, won’t they?...we should tell them to get out. We don’t want any more Dobbys, do we? We can’t order them to die for us-”

There was a clatter as the Basilisk fangs cascaded out of Hermione’s arms. Running at Ron, she flung them around his neck and kissed him full on the mouth. Ron threw away the fangs and broomstick he was holding and responded with such enthusiasm that he lifted Hermione off her feet (Rowling, *Hallows* 502).

Strand argues that alongside the maturity of Ron's empathy to acknowledge the house-elf's helplessness in times of war, Hermione's activism bears fruit. She does not succeed in terms of accomplishing any change in the status of the house-elves, but does end up influencing those around her to improve their perceptions about hierarchical structures ("Dobby" 192). Yet at a fundamental level, the practical failure of Hermione's activism signals the impossibility of radical change to the hierarchy. As demonstrated earlier, the house-elves refuse to yield their cultural identity which holds servitude in highest esteem. Hermione's attempts to manipulate and bully them into agreeing with her anthropocentric view of freedom backfires on her, as they feel deeply insulted in the process (Rowling, *Goblet* 352).

Hermione's failure, to a large extent, is portrayed through her inability to convince most people to join her cause. Strand comments on the gendered role of her activism; as with much of fantasy and science fiction, she argues, the role of saving an oppressed class falls to the 'empathetic female character' (192). However, this gendering also leads to her portrayal in certain ways which impedes the success of her activism. Hermione is depicted as brash and abrasive in her activism, which corresponds to strong female voices in the public sphere being similarly ridiculed or trivialised as unpleasant, bossy, or annoying (Zheng 34-56).³⁶ While feminist criticism of *Harry Potter* 'would make no apologies for the overbearing, somewhat obnoxious way Hermione has of dealing with the

³⁶ The popular stereotyping of strong, opinionated women as hysterical or nasty stems from a masculine discomfort, especially in competitive workplaces, and feminist scholarship has analysed the roots of this in male anxiety, as well as the societal pressure on women compelling them to be extra assertive for their opinions to be considered in a hypermasculine workplace (Kark and Meister 177-198). Regardless of whether Rowling's characterisation of Hermione is meant to be structured this way, her 'bossiness' (Stone 85) consistently puts other characters, male and female, off (*Goblet* 66, *Prince* 322).

world' (Dresang, "Gender" 226), her badgering puts off any prospective allies from joining her cause.

She had been badgering Harry and Ron ever since, firstly to wear the badges, then to persuade others to do the same, and she had also taken to rattling around the Gryffindor common room every evening, cornering people and shaking the collecting tin under their noses.

...Some people, like Neville, had paid up to just stop Hermione glowering at them. A few seemed mildly interested in what she had to say, but were reluctant to take a more active role in campaigning. Many regarded the whole thing as a joke (Rowling, *Goblet* 198).

Moreover, the reluctance of Harry and Ron to join her cause, despite usually being her strongest allies, is portrayed without reservation. Even the usually nice and patient Harry confesses that while he 'liked Hermione very much, she just wasn't the same as Ron.' He claims that Hermione's company entailed much 'less laughter and a lot more hanging around in the library' (278). Cherland argues that 'Hermione and Ron enact the binary of male/female and of rational/ irrational.' Ron's constant belittling of Hermione's activism frames her desire for justice as irrational, and 'the binaries of humanism work to make the desire for justice seem foolish' ("Girls" 279). This analysis correctly identifies Ron's attempts to ridicule Hermione's commitment to her cause.³⁷ However, given the ideological construction of the magical world, the neoliberal insistence on an unchangeable hierarchy suggests that her failure has bigger implications

³⁷ Ron's jokes often come at the expense of Hermione's indignation. Even the naming of her campaign as S.P.E.W (Society for the Protection of Elvish Welfare) seems to undermine its own seriousness, particularly when Ron mockingly asks her if she is also launching a campaign called S.P.U.G or 'Society for the Protection of Ugly Goblins' (Rowling, *Goblet* 390).

than simply being put down by friends. Hermione's lack of success to bring about any real change among the house-elves points towards Rowling's ideological message as analysed in Chapter 3; the only mode of moral behaviour possible is individual action, not collective change.

Hermione's anthropocentric activism, and her refusal to listen to the house-elves' insistence on their need for servitude, establishes that empathy cannot be conditional. Hermione, though well-meaning towards the elves, does not display niceness towards them. On the contrary, she frequently comes across as arrogant and haughty in suggesting she knows what is better for the elves than they themselves do (Rowling, *Goblet* 310, 331, 352; *Phoenix* 221). This lack of niceness signals her moral failure, and is predicated on her lack of empathy in refusing to acknowledge the elves' cultural identity. Listening to or acknowledging the self-identification of the oppressed cannot be partial; even when and especially when the narrative of the other contradicts that of the self. Instead, it is important to reconcile with these differences, while understanding and respecting the principles that govern the worldview of the other. Trying to mould the house-elves conveniently into an image approved by the human 'self' would be as much an act of epistemic violence as trying to exploit them. Hermione's activism, despite its sincere and positive intention, is guilty of being overtly anthropocentric. She tries to assess the house-elves' identity and perception of freedom in the light of her own human definitions of freedom and happiness. This denies the house-elf the opportunity to narrate the full complexity and importance of its own, distinctly non-human identity. As hierarchically inferior in the chain of wizardly life, the house-elves fit the definition of the subaltern, or 'those who have been rendered 'voiceless' in

Lincoln's sense or whose voices have been 'included out' of the dominant discourse of the time' (Seneviratne 26). Any action which continues to render the house-elf voiceless, is portrayed as morally insufficient.

The problem, then, lies in the lack of any effective means of real change. The house-elf, as well as the pet, are already and always defined as others to humans, ontologically differentiated through the existence of magic and Rowling's socially organised ecology. In such a scenario, where the hierarchy shall continue to exist unchallenged, there remains no productive common ground. By shifting the locus of moral behaviour from economic, political, or juridical spaces (all rendered immutable by the invisible hand of magic), Rowling fixes it firmly in the domain of individual acts of niceness and empathy. The issue with a personal, rather than political mode of action, lies in its counterproductive effect. Robert Pfaller identifies this effect in contemporary neoliberal activism.

A good part of the problem of [oppressed] groups was precisely economic, social and juridical, and not cultural or symbolic. And whenever you really solve a problem of a minority group, the visibility of this group decreases. But by insisting on the visibility of these groups, the policies of the new [activists] succeeded at making the problems of these groups permanent. (Pfaller)

Rowling portrays Harry's relationship with Hedwig and the house-elves as the ideal model of moral behaviour in her books, and locates his mode of action in the cultural and symbolic sites of interaction. Empathy, as a governing aspect of his niceness, is the most efficient tool he has to form moral relationships with inferiors. The hierarchy of inferiority, however, remains intact in itself. In the following section, I analyse Harry's use of niceness in his

interaction with non-human companions. The problem and complacency of portraying niceness as morally sufficient behaviour, I argue, is that moral change is not depicted in terms of collective transformation. Instead, it is replaced by images of individual ‘niceness that facilitate profitability and try to defuse class resentment’ (Bramen 330).

4.3. Harry and his Others: Niceness as Moral Action

Rowling insists throughout her books on the importance of niceness as the moral model of social behaviour, which deters resentment and maintains productive social relations. The consequences of not being nice to one’s inferiors can be serious, as depicted in the case of Sirius. Dumbledore, in an episode immediately following the death of Sirius, reasons that the wizard’s death was partly his own fault. In his mistreatment of Kreacher, he had allowed the elf to grow increasingly resentful of him, culminating in the latter’s collusion with the enemy and assisting in the plan that gets the former killed (Rowling, *Phoenix* 733-734). Sirius’ lack of responsibility in checking his behaviour, and the lack of compensatory niceness in his behaviour, invokes Kreacher’s class resentment, and culminates in his own death.³⁸

³⁸ The abatement of class resentment, while denying any introspection into class inequality and the possibility of conflict, is a mode of action which reinforces neoliberal governmentality by transferring interclass discourse to the purely social level. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the cultures of gift giving and performative niceness conceal overtly economic relations within the appearance of social bonds. While class conflict and inequality are economically perceived and engaged with, the class ‘resentment that individuals feel resides in the structured relations of the creation and the reproduction of social levels’ (Barbalet 154; Marshall 170). Sirius evokes Kreacher’s resentment through his abuse, which serves as a reminder that he does not consider Kreacher his social peer, or a member of his social level (Rowling, *Phoenix* 211-213). When Harry treats Kreacher nicely, he functions by acknowledging the elf’s social identity and, through the giving of a gift of great value to him, recognises him as a social peer (*Hallows* 166). Kreacher remains at the same political and economic level with regards to Harry as he was to Sirius, a bonded servant fixed in place by his ontology. However, his transformation takes place at the level of social behaviour; he now becomes a member of Harry’s social milieu, cooking for him happily and referring to him affectionately as ‘master Harry’ (264). It is his class resentment that Harry’s niceness abates, not his class position itself. The human/elf hierarchy of inequality remains intact.

In this section, I analyse how Harry avoids class resentment from his inferiors through an empathetic mode of nice behaviour. Firstly, I analyse his warm and optimistic relationship with his owl, Hedwig. He balances a healthy respect for Hedwig's sovereignty with an owner's responsibility for her welfare, and the boy and his owl mature together in their seven-year relationship. Secondly, I show the effects of his niceness and empathy on Dobby, and briefly, Kreacher, in alleviating class resentment. By allowing the house-elves their own voice, Harry's patient listening gains him the creatures' trust. This model of behaviour is portrayed as a moral ideal through a number of emotionally charged episodes, and Rowling insists that niceness is the most efficient model to maintain balance in a world which is fundamentally hierarchical. However, this model of niceness does nothing to address the roots of why a hierarchy exists in the first place. I argue that the primary role of niceness is alleviating class resentment, and it therefore is a model of behaviour which is contingent on the existence of class hierarchies to begin with.

4.3.1 Harry and Hedwig: An Empathetic Model of Growing Together

I argued in Section 4.1.1 that pets, and especially owls, are depicted as remarkably intelligent, and able to experience emotions and express distinct personalities. Rowling uses this depiction to suggest the moral superiority of characters who acknowledge this intelligence, and are empathetic towards their pets. The benefits of these moral patterns of behaviour are portrayed within warm and emotionally saturated depictions of relationships between humans and their pets. Harry's relationship with Hedwig provides the most important example of this depiction. While his friends do treat their pets considerably well, Harry and Hedwig seem to have a bond that is portrayed as reciprocal and

involving a considerable emotional investment. Out of all the human-pet partnerships, Harry and Hedwigs' relationship is portrayed with most frequency. As a result, the maturity of their emotions with regards to each other is visible with great clarity over the seven years of their time together. The emotional complexity of their relationship is made evident in episodes where Harry and Hedwig are angry with each other. During such events, their engagement with each other is portrayed in a language which highlights their sentimental investment in each other, rather than Harry's ownership of her as mere pet.

"I can't use you," Harry told her, looking around for the school owls. "I've got to use one of these..."

Hedwig gave a very loud hoot and took off so suddenly that her talons cut into his shoulder. She kept her back to Harry all the time he was tying his letter to the leg of a large barn owl. When the barn owl had flown off, Harry reached out to stroke Hedwig, but she clicked her beak furiously and soared up into the rafters out of reach.

"First Ron, then you," said Harry angrily. "*This isn't my fault.*" (Rowling, *Goblet* 256-257)

This social bond between the boy and his owl is initiated in the first book through another social bond regarding Harry's acquisition of Hedwig. Hagrid gives him the owl as a birthday gift (*Stone* 63). Because Harry receives his owl as a gift, there is an economy of indebtedness, and an obligation he owes Hagrid through this transaction (Mauss, *Gift* 4). This obligation expresses itself, among other things, through his commitment to taking care of her. His responsibility is depicted in the texts in the terms of his affection for his owl, as evidenced in his concern and outrage when the Dursleys refuse to let Hedwig out of her cage, and

her emotional distress deeply disturbs Harry (Rowling, *Chamber* 7). Harry's empathy is made evident in his psychological dependence on Hedwig's well-being, because 'if we do not care about the other's affective state, empathising is likely to be psychologically difficult' (Snow, "Empathy" 71). This empathy takes the form of a recognition on Harry's part that there is a reciprocity of the bond between them. In the instances where Hedwig is angry with or offended at Harry, he never tries to make her obey him by asserting his ownership over her. Instead, he delicately negotiates with her as an individual independent from himself. Once again, the language of the narrative communicates the deeply emotional, personal experiences these negotiations involve.

““Just find him, all right?” Harry said, stroking her back as he carried her on his arm to one of the holes in the wall. “Before the Dementors do.”

She nipped his finger, perhaps rather harder than she would ordinarily have done, but hooted softly in a reassuring sort of way all the same. Then she spread her wings and took off into the sunrise. (Rowling, *Goblet* 202)

In treating Hedwig with empathy, Harry wins back her trust as an independent individual and restores the balance in their relationship. His fundamental sense of empathy in this regard, maturing through his childhood relationship with the owl, comprises two important factors. Firstly, he acknowledges her as an individual, with her own identity which is independent of her status as his pet. Secondly, his empathy depends on a fundamental

emotional dependence on Hedwig's welfare.³⁹ Both these factors lead up to the tragic, and emotionally charged climax of their relationship. As Harry is attempting to flee the Death Eaters, Hedwig is hit by a curse, and Harry's 'dreadful, gut-wrenching pang' at her death is communicated in his 'ramming [of] Hedwig's cage on to the floor, refusing to believe that she was dead' (*Hallows* 54). In many ways, the blankness Harry feels after losing Hedwig initiates his journey in the final book towards the point where he is prepared to sacrifice himself.. 'It is only after Harry overcomes his fear,' Fraser Los argues, 'after accepting his own mortality in terms of his loving connection with all life around him, that his mature life begins' ("Death" 33). Hedwig's memory pointedly returns to haunt him as he walks towards his death. He wishes 'if he could only have died like Hedwig, so quickly he would not have known it had happened' (Rowling, *Hallows* 554-555). Harry's relationship with Hedwig, and the true extent of the trauma her death causes her is expressed in the following internal monologue. Harry mourns Hedwig as an equal, not as a pet. At the same time, because of his empathetic connection to her emotional well-being, he feels empty without her. For the first time, it is suggested, Harry feels truly anchorless.

The realisation crashed over him: he felt ashamed of himself as the tears stung his eyes. The owl had been his companion, his one great

³⁹ Harry's relief at having assuaged Hedwig's anger is palpable in this optimistic, warm episode. This derives from the special register of companionship that pets offer, from a psychological point of view. Jen Wrye argues that 'pet relations are important because they offer [support and pleasure] without [apprehension or distress] insofar as individuals feel unconditionally cared for by their pets' (1053). The bond between Harry and Hedwig does occasionally offer distress, but it is always resolved, and always tempered by this empathetic vision of a nearly unconditional caring.

link with the magical world whenever he had been forced to return to the Dursleys. (39)

That Hedwig's memory returns to him at the moment of his sacrifice evidences how powerful his relationship with his owl was, and how considerable her loss is in pushing him towards the emotional point where he is ready to die. What the emotional appeal of his sacrifice, tempered with the affectionate and mournful images of Hedwig, conceals is the passivity in his decision. His death had already been hinted by a prophecy (*Phoenix* 741-744), which 'fixed' his destiny. Nikolas Wandering argues that by withholding the information about the certainty of his prophesied death until the last moment, Dumbledore ensures that 'in this way Harry's self-sacrifice can truly become his own decision, not imposed upon him by an outward commandment.'⁴⁰ He compares this to Christ's self-sacrifice, quoting St. Anselm's claim that 'God did not command Jesus to die but to restore justice' ("Sacrifice" 39). It is Hedwig's death, after seven years of an intensely emotional relationship, which adds to the trauma that pushes him towards accepting his fate. At this point, Harry is no longer be able to bear the thought of other close friends dying for him. The 'images of Fred, Lupin and Tonks lying dead in the Great Hall' (551), combined with Voldemort's threat to 'punish every last man, woman and child' if Harry does not surrender (532), deny him the psychological clarity needed for any 'argument with the universe' (Mendlesohn, *Rhetoric* 17). His emotional trauma pushes him towards passivity, as Rowling portrays a subtle yet stubborn form of consequentialism as what guides Harry's moral compass. Hedwig's loss

⁴⁰ Harry only finds out very late, through a journey into Snape's memory, that he had always been doomed to die if Voldemort had to be defeated (*Hallows* 549-551). He accepts this information with remarkable passivity, and after a few moments of trepidation, decides to follow his destiny.

is the first death in the books that sets off the chain of events which culminates in this sacrifice.

Harry's bond with Hedwig contains the dual impulse which Aaron Simmons identifies as crucial for 'a mature and virtuous empathy.' His emotional bond with her, and his guilt at hurting or offending her, highlights that he is 'willing to intellectually and emotionally identify, connect, and relate with' her. Simultaneously, his refusal to assert his ownership, and an acknowledgment of her independence, underlines the 'awareness of oneself as distinct from others' ("Empathy" 109-110). I argue in the final section that this virtue of empathy also motivates Harry's behavioural niceness towards house-elves. The house-elves' tendency to be grateful for the smallest acts of human appreciation amplifies the perception of Harry's actions as moral. I demonstrate that such a model of action does not go any further than merely acknowledging the house-elves' identity as independent actors, and a willingness to listen to their sides of the story. The hierarchy between humans and house-elves remains intact, and Harry's acts of benevolence are contingent upon his superiority in the first place. Replacing truly moral, introspective action with such a superficial, performative model of behaviour is symptomatic of a cultural complacency. Ideologically, it suggests that the alleviation of class resentment, not the reorganisation of skewed class structures, is what sufficient moral behaviour comprises in the neoliberal world.

4.3.2 Harry and the House-Elves: The Abatement of Class Resentment

As with Hedwig, Harry's treatment of house-elves is largely depicted in his empathy. I analyse two significant interactions Harry has with members of the

species; his relationship with Dobby and response to his death (Rowling, *Hallows* 385-389), and the role of his niceness in abating the class resentment in Kreacher's behaviour (158-165). I argue that while both instances are portrayed in emotionally charged, optimistic language which celebrates Harry's heroism, they remain largely symbolic and tokenistic. I demonstrate how these episodes portray a deeply complacent vision of what comprises sufficient moral action in Rowling's neoliberal world.

Having grown up in a muggle household, Harry has the privilege of not being aware of the hierarchies and associated customs of magical life. Therefore, during his first introduction to Dobby, he impulsively treats the house-elf as an equal. As a common courtesy, he asks the elf to sit down, at which the latter bursts into tears. Through Dobby's emotional response to Harry's niceness, Rowling portrays that this simple act is magnified to a grand gesture for the elf.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, "I didn't mean to offend you or anything."

"Offend Dobby!" choked the elf. "Dobby has *never* been asked to sit down by a wizard- like an *equal*-" (*Chamber* 16).

Through Dobby's overwhelmed reaction, and Harry's bewilderment at the same, Rowling depicts Harry as a young child who is inherently nice to others without recognising it. Much like his impulse of gift-giving analysed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2, this impulse is depicted as intuitive and organic. Harry treats Dobby as an equal, and later tricks Mr. Malfoy into freeing the house-elf (311). This act of liberation sets Dobby free, and he shows his gratitude by claiming 'he can obey anyone he likes and Dobby will do whatever Harry Potter

wants him to do' (*Prince* 394). What this optimistic depiction of Dobby's newly found freedom of choice conceals is that serving a human master is still the primary mode of his autonomy.⁴¹ While Dobby can choose whom to obey, his old tendencies of punishing himself if he fails still remain intact, giving Harry considerable power over him. This is evidenced in the following exchange between the two, when Harry asks him to investigate Draco Malfoy.

Harry went on, "I want to know where he's going, who he's meeting, and what he's doing. I want you to follow him around the clock."

"Yes, Harry Potter!" said Dobby at once, his great eyes shining with excitement. "And if Dobby does it wrong, Dobby will throw himself off the topmost tower, Harry Potter!"

"There won't be any need for that," said Harry hastily. (395)

In this episode, Harry immediately recognises the hierarchical command he wields over Dobby, and asks the elf to not hurt himself, which portrays his innate niceness and acknowledgment of Dobby as an individual, not a tool to use. However, Dobby's happiness at the prospect of punishing himself if he fails reveals that the normative hierarchy of power between the human and the house-elf still dominates their relationship. Harry's demonstration of his niceness is fundamentally dependent on the fixed nature of the house-elf's inferior, blindly obedient status to himself.⁴² Thus, when Harry gives Dobby the task of spying

⁴¹ Harry's benevolence as a master is portrayed by his comparison to the Malfoys, who were cruel to their servant (Rowling, *Chamber* 16-21). Dobby's choice of Harry over the Malfoys is certainly a rational one; Harry has given him no reason to think he wishes to abuse him. However, the dimension of power between Harry and Dobby is still considerably skewed by the house-elf's innate tendency to follow every command. This suggests Dobby's compulsion to serve someone has not changed fundamentally (Ostry, "Mudblood" 96; Carrey 14-37), it is only that a nicer person occupies the position of authority for him.

⁴² In some ways, Harry's identity as the destined hero of Rowling's quest fantasy fixes him in this hierarchy. He can only ever be nice to Dobby in a hierarchical, benevolent manner. As the hero of his quest, Harry serves as the reminder that 'hierarchies are images of order, and this appears to constitute

on Malfoy, the house-elf does his task diligently. The obsessive limits to which Dobby still feels the compulsion to follow orders is revealed in his weekly report, when the elf proudly confesses to have ‘not slept for a week.’ (423) Even as a free elf, he fails to completely let go of his kin’s compulsion to base self-worth on their dedication to obeying a command. Harry, while sympathetic to Dobby and asking him to get some rest, is more eager to get the report on Malfoy. He hastily moves the conversation on before Hermione can intervene, and soon becomes preoccupied with his own quest regarding Malfoy (423-425). While there is ostensibly some comic effect intended in this dialogue, the remarkably skewed power balance between Harry and Dobby continues to remain unchanged.

Harry’s moral superiority over those who abuse their house-elves is portrayed in his concern and consideration for Dobby as an autonomous subject with his own needs and emotions. He consciously resists any solitarist view of the elf as a servant, or a tool, whom he can command to do anything he pleases. However, this relationship of niceness-from-above is problematically similar to the cultural notion of white benevolence.⁴³ Lee Bebout’s definition of this practice can be applied to interpret Harry’s benevolence towards Dobby.

White benevolence is a form of racial paternalism... the cultural trope of white benevolence treats the problem of racial injustice solely the territory of white

part of the appeal of these stories...without hierarchy, without mastery, all would dissolve into chaos’ (Hourihan 64-65). In this construction, Dobby is ontologically compelled to obey Harry. Niceness can only derive for the hero’s empathetic, individual care for the elf’s well-being, and this refusal to abuse the power that he has been irrevocably given.

⁴³ Benevolence is different from genuine social empathy in its lack of reciprocity; benevolent niceness can only ever flow one way. Harry’s niceness and moral superiority is still based on the immense power he has over Dobby. It is Harry, not Dobby, who has the autonomy to be nice to his inferior. Doubly bound by his social inferiority and his pathological need to obey commands, the elf has no choice but to be nice to Harry.

people, stripping away the agency of communities of color. These paternalisms do not simply function oppositionally, with one being liberatory and the other oppressive. To the contrary, they are mutually dependent and influential, reinforcing racial hierarchies under the guise of protectionism. (“Benevolence” 14-15)

Unlike Hermione’s paternalism, which was rejected by the elves because they felt her views were oppressive, Harry practises a more efficient model. His protection and empathy towards Dobby complements the latter’s belief that serving Harry unquestioningly is in his best interest. This model of benevolence aids Harry in claiming a moral high ground through token acts of niceness. The most emotionally charged example of this, framed in the language of heroic sacrifice, follows Dobby’s death. On a rescue mission to save Harry and his friends from what would have been certain death for them, Dobby is murdered. It is revealed that he sacrificed himself to save Harry; the knife that kills him was thrown by Bellatrix with the intention to kill Harry (Rowling, “Hallows” 385). Overwhelmed by guilt and grief for the elf who sacrificed himself to save the lives of those he cared for, Harry honours Dobby through a voluntary act of physical labour, which sublimates his mourning.

“I want to do it properly,” were the first words of which Harry was fully conscious of speaking. “Not by magic. Have you got a spade?”

And shortly afterward he had set to work, alone, digging the grave in the place that Bill had shown him at the end of the garden, between bushes. He dug with a kind of fury, relishing the manual work, glorying in the non-magic of it, for every drop of his sweat and every blister felt like a gift to the elf who had saved their lives (386-388).

Rowling portrays Harry's indulging in physical labour as a deliberate suspension of his superior, magical identity, to honour Dobby's memory. Magic is considered far superior to physical work in Rowling's world.⁴⁴ In indulging in physical labour to dig Dobby's grave, the young wizard thus willingly denies his own identity as a magical individual, 'glorying in the non-magic of it' (*Hallows* 387). This self-denial, at the narrative level, functions as a token of respect to Dobby's hierarchical position as non-wizard. However, a token is all that this gesture remains, when one considers that Dobby would not have been murdered if not for the power relation between him and Harry in the first place. His unwavering loyalty, and his obsession to follow every word of command Harry uttered, led to his sacrifice to save his chosen master. The language used to frame this narrative celebrates Harry's heroism and moral character, depicting him as revelling in every drop of sweat, every blister which reminded him of Dobby's sacrifice. This narrative focus on Harry draws attention away from the fact that it is Dobby, in fact, who has made the ultimate sacrifice. Rowling uses Dobby as a redshirt, a stock character in popular fiction who dies early to ensure that the protagonist(s) triumphant journey may continue (Uhlenbruch 176).⁴⁵ The conflation of Dobby's ontological, racial impulse to protect a human master with his status as a redshirt dooms him for death. His sacrifice provides Harry the resources to continue his journey, and portray his moral superiority through his token act of niceness in tribute to the fallen elf. Once his benevolence has

⁴⁴ This can be evidenced in the behaviour of wizards who are most obsessed with their magical heritage in the books. When Merope Gaunt drops a pot and attempts to pick it up, her father intervenes. In his obsession with the superiority of wizards over muggles, he orders her not to 'grub on the floor like some filthy Muggle,' but to use magic to retrieve the pot (Rowling, *Prince* 194).

⁴⁵ The term 'redshirt' derives from the soldiers in red uniforms in *Star Trek* who always seem to die early, for the commanders in golden uniforms to then step in and demonstrate their prowess (Valentinelli and Gates, *Upside* 20-45).

established his moral authority, Harry returns to his magical quest again as a fully wizardly individual.

While Harry establishes his moral superiority through acts of benevolence towards Dobby from the very beginning, his relationship with Kreacher is depicted as evolving over the books. His niceness, and his willingness to let the elf speak for himself, are crucial in alleviating Kreacher's resentment. For most of his time in the books, Kreacher is defined by the language of others. Sirius' hatred and resentment towards him stems from Kreacher's loyalty to the Black family, who Sirius fell out with. This resentment inspires an equally strong hostility in Kreacher for his master, which culminates in the elf's plotting the murder of the man (Rowling, *Phoenix* 733-734). It is Dumbledore who identifies and tells Harry that Kreacher's flawed character owes less to any inherent propensity for evil, and more to the hatred he has received from wizardly masters.

"Kreacher is what he has been made by wizards, Harry," said Dumbledore.

"Yes, he is to be pitied. His existence has been as miserable as your friend Dobby's. He was forced to do Sirius's bidding, because Sirius was the last of the family to which he was enslaved, but he felt no true loyalty to him. And whatever Kreacher's faults, it must be admitted that Sirius did nothing to make Kreacher's lot easier" (735).

Harry's impulsive desire to avenge his godfather's death by killing Kreacher is tempered by Dumbledore's insistence on the need to acknowledge the house-elf's plurality. While an aspect of Kreacher's identity has indeed been corrupted and twisted by the resentment he had for Sirius' abuse, Dumbledore suggests that Kreacher has an individual identity of his own which may yet be

salvable. The headmaster's intuition is proven true when Kreacher finally reveals his deep loyalty and moral relationship with Sirius' brother Regulus, who was only one to ever love him like an equal (*Hallows* 158-164). This lesson ultimately leads to a necessary exercise of empathy on Harry's part, when he needs to interrogate the elf about a missing locket. Though he is initially abrasive and aggressive in his questioning, Kreacher's dramatic change of mood throws him off guard. Usually hostile and non-responsive, the elf breaks down in tears, and Harry realises that empathy and not aggression would be more a fruitful mode of conversation in alleviating Kreacher's suffering and gaining information.

"Kreacher," said Harry fiercely, "I order you..."

"Mundungus Fletcher," croaked the elf, his eyes still tight shut. "Mundungus Fletcher stole it all: Miss Bella and Miss Cissy's pictures, my mistress's gloves"...

Kreacher was gulping for air: his hollow chest was rising and falling rapidly, then his eyes flew open and he uttered a blood-curdling scream...Harry reacted instinctively: as Kreacher lunged for the poker standing in the grate, he launched himself upon the elf, flattening him. Hermione's scream mingled with Kreacher's, but Harry bellowed louder than both of them: "Kreacher, I order you to stay still" (*Hallows* 98).

Over the course of a few sentences, Harry changes his tone from fierce interrogation to his first command as Kreacher's master forbidding him to hurt himself. There is a maturation of Harry's capacity for empathy in this chapter, evidenced in his respectful silence allowing Kreacher to catch his breath. He follows this pointedly by requesting, rather than ordering Kreacher, to 'when

you feel up to it... please sit up' (164). For the first time, Kreacher opens up to the trio, and tells his story in his own terms (164-171). His exercise in niceness is brought along by a necessity for information, and he patiently lets Kreacher tell his own story as an act of benevolence. What allows Harry to coax Kreacher into cooperating with them is an act of abating the elf's class resentment; by demonstrating to him that he was on the same quest as Regulus, who the elf was loyal to, he establishes himself as an empathetic ally.⁴⁶

Strand argues that Kreacher's response to Harry's empathetic behaviour is not so much an optimistic promise of a better future, but a marker of how traumatic the elf's condition must have been before. 'Kreacher's nastiness, prejudice, back-history of abuse by wizards, and ultimate response to kindness,' she comments, are patent illustrations of 'the fetid state of wizarding affairs with regard to his kind' ("Dobby", 195). Harry's niceness to Kreacher thus yields results, only because niceness is rare in the community where Kreacher serves. Moreover, by demonstrating his alliance with Regulus' cause, Harry also proves his willingness to fight against the same history which caused Kreacher's prejudice and abuse in the past (195). In some ways, this transformation can be identified as 'the Sambo mentality- because the master or the captor did not implement the worst expectations of slaves or captives, a sense of relief is felt, and the master or captor is now revered as a good person' (Huddleston-Mattai and Mattai 348). Harry's benevolent treatment of Kreacher is contingent upon

⁴⁶ Harry consolidates this position of ally by gifting Kreacher the locket Regulus once carried (Rowling, *Hallows* 163). This locket is of no value to Harry, as it is merely the replica of a real Horcrux they are searching for (*Prince* 433). However, Harry recognises its symbolic value for Kreacher. Regulus, and not Harry, is the only wizard who ever treated Kreacher with real love, and Harry uses that memory to win Kreacher's favour by gifting him the locket. As gift-giver, this gesture of niceness significantly abates the elf's resentment by appealing to the symbolic memory of Regulus.

his hierarchical superiority over the house-elf, and as in the case with Dobby, he asserts his moral superiority by choosing not to abuse a power he already possesses, and always will. This view of niceness is a compensatory one, a cultural strategy which ‘replaces economic democracy with social democracy, where friendly gestures — a smile, a handshake, a conversation — compensate for the lack of economic equality’ (Tirado Bramen, “Niceness” 334). This model of compensatory niceness proves to be enough to reduce resentment in the elf. From a hostile, vengeful creature who wished Harry dead, he is transformed into a patronly household help, fussing over Harry with affection.

The kitchen was almost unrecognisable. Every surface now shone: copper pots and pans had been burnished to a rosy glow, the wooden table top gleamed, the goblets and plates already laid for dinner glinted in the light from a merrily blazing fire, on which a cauldron was simmering. Nothing in the room, however, was more dramatically different than the house-elf who now came hurrying towards Harry, dressed in a snowy-white towel, his ear hair as clean and fluffy as cotton wool, Regulus’s locket bouncing on his thin chest.

“Shoes off, if you please, Master Harry, and hands washed before dinner,” croaked Kreacher, seizing the Invisibility Cloak and slouching off to hang it on a hook on the wall, beside a number of old-fashioned robes that had been freshly laundered (Rowling, *Hallows* 212-213).

The condition of the house stands as a metaphor for the emotional well-being of the house-elf charged with taking care of it. It is also revealed in this episode that Kreacher’s cooking has become impeccable following Harry’s act of niceness towards him (215). The entire scene unfolds like a safe, family space, where the trio can securely plan their quest while Kreacher takes care of

them. The entire transaction, however, is founded on the notion that Kreacher has been transformed from a reluctant slave to a happy servant. Servility, as with Dobby, dominates Harry's relation with the elf. While their behaviour towards each other improves dramatically after the episode where Kreacher gets to tell his story, the hierarchy that allows Harry to be benevolent to Kreacher stays intact.⁴⁷

In both his treatment of Hedwig and the elves, Harry's primary mode of behaviour comprises an empathetic commitment to the emotional welfare of the other, and an acknowledgment of their sovereign identity. These impulses are what drive him to act nicely. However, Rowling constructs her non-human characters as ontologically inferior, Especially in case of the house-elves, this ontology is governed by the invisible hand of socially organised ecology. There is no way in such a scenario to firmly establish whether the house-elves do enjoy servitude, or whether they have been brainwashed into it. The underclass simply exists as a common sense reality, and are taken for granted by the characters. By denying any narrative logic which allows an investigation of the hierarchy itself, Rowling portrays niceness towards the underclass as the most efficient model of moral behaviour. This niceness does not allow any productive or critical investigation into the roots of oppression. Instead, it serves its role by 'acting as a behavioural substitute for deep structural inequalities' (Tirado Bramen, *Niceness* 31). The image of the house-elf, and Harry's portrayal as an

⁴⁷ Kreacher's last appearance confirms the importance of Regulus, rather than Harry, to his personal quest. Inspired by the return of the locket which belonged to his master who died fighting Voldemort, Kreacher takes up his fight. He rallies the house-elves of Hogwarts during the climactic battle, rushing into the fight crying 'fight for my master, defender of the house-elves...in the name of brave Regulus' (588). This optimistic scene of the elves charging voluntarily into battle is tempered by a negation of class resentment, but not class conflict. While Kreacher leads the elves into battle, it is portrayed as a battle not so much for Hogwarts, but against Voldemort, who represents years of abuse for the elves.

ideal model of behaviour towards his inferiors, allows Rowling to claim that individual, behavioural niceness is sufficient in moral life. The neoliberal perpetuation of moral action as individual and self-interested perpetuates a problematic cultural complacency. This complacency takes the form of the popular perception that ‘charm and graciousness to one’s inferiors...is the sign of a gentleman,’ while allowing no introspection into why the inferior exists in the first place. (Mendlesohn, “Crowning” 178). As a model of moral behaviour, this resolves conflicts by abating class resentment among inferiors, but does not acknowledge the possibility of engaging with the roots of class itself.

Conclusion

Rowling populates her magical world with a variety of fantastic flora and fauna. While much of these are used for world-building, she demonstrates human wizards and sentient magical beings as occupying the same social and geographic spaces. I demonstrated that the world of *Harry Potter* is structured in terms of normative hierarchies, where wizards locate themselves above all other species of magical creatures. Since moral action is only restricted to social behaviour, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, whether a person is good or not is portrayed in terms of their social interaction with their others. Through my comparative analyses of the variety of behaviour that the house-elves, owls, Hagrid, Lupin or Fleur are subjected to, I demonstrate that niceness is offered by Rowling as the chief form of moral behaviour. Overt cruelty and bigotry is condemned as undesirable. Callous prejudice is also demonstrated as irrational, but the room to train oneself in being more empathetic is offered to characters.

Harry as the ideal moral candidate behaves in terms of an innate niceness. I analysed how this niceness is a compensatory model. It is driven by the acknowledgment of the independent identity of an ‘other’, as well as a psychological imperative to commit to their emotional well-being. Harry’s morality functions in terms of abating resentment, and thus gaining social approval from his peers, shifting questions of moral action to the social rather than structural or political discourse.

Some of Harry’s most empathetic relationships, as demonstrated here, are depicted in terms of his love and care for social inferiors. While compensatory niceness offers a socially acceptable mode of behaviour, his acknowledgment of the other’s identity as inferior does not lead to any further investigation. Instead, Harry’s ability to exercise moral authority depends on his superior status in the hierarchy. His morality is depicted in terms of individualised, atomised niceness of inferiors. The amplified gratitude he receives in return from characters like Dobby or Hagrid are used by Rowling to uphold niceness as a morally sufficient mode of behaviour. However, in a neoliberal worldview, where the governmentality insists that the hierarchy is inevitable, any productive moral action needs to be exercised at the systemic level. By perpetuating the ideology of neoliberal activism, which subtly shifts the register of action from political, social, or juridical sectors to the symbolic and personal, Rowling denies the possibility of sincere, radical morality. Her celebration of niceness in *Harry Potter* as a model of moral action is part of the greater popular cultural notion which leads to dangerous complacencies about

what comprises moral action is a society which is becoming progressively more unequal.

CONCLUSION

Concluding Statement: Observations Following an Analysis of *Harry Potter* as a Neoliberal Fantasy

To address how *Harry Potter* is embedded in the cultural ideology of neoliberal governmentality, I analysed two complementary ideological functions served by the books. Firstly, I demonstrated how the texts construct a fantasy society which is inherently and mysteriously unequal. Secondly, I analysed how Rowling displaces productive moral action with a social, individual behaviour based on niceness. The central aim of my research has been to demonstrate Rowling's reconfiguration of freedom, morals, and social behaviour in her books as governed by the economic rationale of self-interest. In neoliberal societies, the 'idea of choice is connected intimately to our understanding of ourselves as free, autonomous actors.' Underlying this cultural optimism, there is a less overt hegemony which ensures that 'despite endless proliferation of matters over which choice can be exercised and options available, many of our choices are preconfigured to preclude more fundamental choices' (Sugarman 105). The vision of empowerment and autonomy is depicted as not absolute and arbitrary, but dependent upon certain underlying principles; the journey to becoming a wizard is at the same time the quest to become a *homo economicus*, and while individuals are certainly free, what their freedom constitutes is fixed by the rationale of the space they inhabit.

I demonstrated the hegemonic functioning of Hogwarts School, and its role in portraying the invisible hand of magic as encompassing all magical life

in the books. The ideological implications of this lie in the conception of magic as a metaphor for empowerment. Since Rowling offers her characters greater power through the harnessing of magic, yet keeps the sources of magic invisible, she offers a worldview where empowerment is contingent on obedience.¹ The depiction of Hogwarts, as well the house system it operates, enforce the authority of tradition, and interpellate students into ideological subjects. The activities and rituals which take place at Hogwarts School regulate and prefix specific categories of values and identities for students to adopt. However, through the illusion of choice, students are made to operate voluntarily, under the notion that they are willing participants.

The classroom pedagogy at Hogwarts further establishes the absolute authority of the magical principle. Information is downloaded for the students, rather than critically engaged with, yet didacticism is avoided through the exotic and colourful tapestry of magical trivia that every book expands on. This mode of pedagogy maintains its apparent desirability by introducing more overtly unpleasant, coercive modes of education. In keeping the hegemonic nature of the school intact, the students participate in a preservation of the current status quo, portrayed as justice. The invisible hand which keeps muggles and wizards separate from each other remains mysterious. Thus, the only mode of interaction

¹ The central conflict between good and evil in *Harry Potter* is predicated on the maintenance of hegemonic control. Voldemort, and his supporters, represent a totalitarian regime, who seek to govern through an overtly 'political society...represented through structures of coercion' (Lahiry 176). The alternative to this is presented as Hogwarts, as a microcosm what magical society should be organised as. Dumbledore's liberal approach, and the presence of magic itself as the ultimate authority, allows the school to function as a 'civil society... represented through structures of legitimation and consent' (176). The preservation of this second form of administration is portrayed as the fight for the good side. This is governed by the neoliberal impulse of keeping the state and its machinery concealed and sublimated in the ostensibly independent functioning of the 'free market.' Rowling's use of the trope of magic doubles as a metaphor for the invisible hand of the capitalist market, keeping all action circumscribed within itself.

with the muggles is that of paternalism. Rowling constructs the moral authority of her wizards in terms of epistemic violence, and morally justifies this through the image of the invisible hand.

This invisible hand also governs economic autonomy. By making economic power necessary to wield magical power, Rowling interpellates her characters' identities into that of a consumer rationale. Access to magical commodities is portrayed as an empowering feature of magical life. Yet, both the value and the accessibility of commodities is fixed by an economic rationale external to the consumers. By internalising this set of principles, and following these rules transforms the individual into the *homo economicus*.² At the same time, though market desire is constructed through the conflation of cultural needs with newly marketed commodities, personal responsibility is transformed entirely to consumers. While this offers an optimistic vision of characters standing up for themselves, it also absolves the market of any responsibility in being accountable. In such a market, problematic commodities like love potions which manipulate the will of others circulate freely. Rowling uses a number of strategies to downplay the danger of such commodities. However, in a neoliberal economy, where self-interest is always in competition with another individual's interest, trivialisation of consent is not unsurprising. The neoliberal economy serves to protect the market from contingencies, and does not put much effort into regulating commodities which may be dangerous for consumers.

² This rationale of self-interest, however, is not an organic one which develops uniquely from an individual's specific attributes. Instead, it is a set of choices and principles which the ideal neoliberal subject internalises and subsequently misrecognises as his/her own rationale (Persky 221-231).

Rowling prevents such a clinical worldview from coming across as stultifying or cold by embedding economic rationale in everyday social behaviour. In the last two chapters, I demonstrate how different characters collect items, exchange gifts, and have social relationships with their inferiors. How they behave socially is portrayed as a marker of their moral status. Gift cultures help sublimate the unpleasant clinicality of commodity exchange into friendly, warm social relationships. Harry is portrayed as a paragon of moral virtue because he gives gifts freely, and treats his inferiors with empathy and niceness. However, the moral validity of his action is mostly demonstrated through the deployment of unpleasant foil characters. His generosity is based on a self-interest for social status, and is contingent upon his considerable economic wealth in the first place. Similarly, his niceness is a function of his empathetic acknowledgment of others as independent individuals with their own opinions. In a worldview which does not allow the hierarchy to change, Harry's niceness is not a sufficient model of action. While he acknowledges the inferiority of creatures like house-elves, his morality never extends to an understanding of how their ontological servility is organised, or whether it is a false consciousness being portrayed as the 'common sense' identity of the elves.³ Instead, he directly depends on his superior status to act morally by being nice and generous to them. This model of behaviour targets at abating class resentment, rather than addressing class conflict or inequality itself, thus remaining a superficial and conservative moral strategy.

³ In the Gramscian definition, *senso comune* is fundamentally concerned with the concealment of ideologically produced standards and principles as a body of impersonal, eternal truisms (Crehan 43-58).

I have analysed the specific neoliberal ideology which informs Rowling's narrative depictions of freedom and moral action. Locating these highly popular texts of children's literature within the greater context of socio-economic ideology and the cultural configuration of fundamental concepts, I have explored how the deeply individuated morals of the texts is tempered with the liberating, emancipatory vision of magical empowerment and activity. My first two chapters largely focus on the narrative construction of the status quo as inevitable and governed by the mysterious laws of magic. Such a vision allows the texts to literalise magic as a quasi-religious, Gramscian 'spontaneous philosophy' which regulates all individual autonomy, without ever revealing its own principles.

This construction, as the third and fourth chapters explore, transfers the possibility of moral action to the sphere of individual acts of niceness and empathy, as any collective transformation of the structure itself is denied through the vision of magic as eternal and unknowable. This evaluation of *Harry Potter* is of paramount importance in understanding and acknowledging the cultural impact of the increasing global phenomenon, whereby 'the inevitable alienation of neoliberal capitalism is replicated throughout all social spheres...The individual is taught that to have a responsibility for the care of others diminishes one's own identity' (Wren and Waller 501). Over the course of the four chapters, I have explored how the metaphor of magic in *Harry Potter* is employed to construct a worldview which is resonant with a socio-economic ideology which posits that all human 'collective social identity is circumscribed by neoliberalism as well' (501). My scholarship identifies how Rowling uses the narrative of magical empowerment, and triumphant visions of child characters

defeating great evil, to perpetuate a deeply troubling moral complacency, one whose political and ideological roots can best be understood by considering Rowling's stories as fiction for the neoliberal age.

Children's Literature Scholarship and the Problem of Complacency in Children's Books

The political importance of children's books, especially texts with such significant global impact as *Harry Potter*, is largely predicated upon their role in disseminating dominant cultural and moral values and notions for young readers. Tom Engelhardt critiques best-selling books of the 1990s for 'portraying children mainly as consumers and the mall as the site of their encounters with abundance' (56). This reconfiguration of autonomy in economic terms of consumptions certainly has a significant effect on Rowling's fantasy, as Chapters 2 and 3 have discussed in detail. The texts merit special scholarly attention, however, due to their strategy in configuring images of contemporary economic life and neoliberal visions of autonomy within the exciting, fresh, and affectively appealing narrative vision of magic. This strategy makes the books 'more distinctive and acceptable,' which in turn significantly adds to their cultural impact 'to shape the choices and habits of the readers as consumers (young and old)' (Zipes, *Sticks* 6).

As I have discussed in the Introduction, as well as throughout my thesis, much of existing scholarship on the texts have critiques their stultifying visions of freedom and moral action, and are informed by an understanding that 'all developmental paths are ideologically constructed, involving conformity to social norms' (Stephens, *Ideology* 3-4). My approach to the texts as distinctly

neoliberal in their moral ideology, however, allows me to contribute to ongoing discussions about the problematic ethos of *Harry Potter* from a new critical angle. My research into the dissemination of affectively appealing moral visions for young readers highlights the texts' participation in a global culture where moral complacency is emerging as an aspect as corrosive and dangerous as overt violence.

'Complacency seems an especially common and troubling vice,' Jason Kawall comments, 'it is not as easily recognised as cruelty, dishonesty, and those vices which lead to distinctively vicious forms of behaviour' (343) *Harry Potter* strongly and vocally condemns in its narratives overt acts of cruelty and viciousness, championing instead characters whose ethics are built around qualities of kindness and niceness. While such qualities are undoubtedly worthy of being offered as models of behaviour in a story for young readers, structuring moral action *solely* in terms of individual kindness and niceness perpetuates a moral complacency which 'does not cause evil or mediocrity; it allows these vices to exist.' On the level of popular culture (and, of course, popular children's literature), complacency is thus more difficult to point out; as a cultural/moral practice, it resides not in active tendencies or judgments, but rather in the passivity of 'easy self-satisfaction' (343) The celebration of niceness or individual kindness towards inferiors while considering their inferiority to be inevitable and inherent, therefore, involves an 'epistemically culpable overestimate of one's accomplishments or status' (347) Such an overestimation is integral to the neoliberal project of disseminating a widespread cultural optimism in the power of the individual, while maintaining the inevitable existence of an underclass regarding whose treatment such models of

niceness are to circulate in moral discourse. The ethics of *Harry Potter*, as my research illuminates, has been celebrated in popular culture as emancipatory and inspiring precisely due to a complacent overestimation. Peter Hunt has warned how, in the discussion of children's books in popular culture, 'liberal-humanist judgments are reintroduced in the guise of forthright judgments,' and 'common-sense has replaced serious and empirical psychological insights' (Hunt, *Understanding* 6). My research offers a new and productive socio-political perspective to understand how complacency and the perpetuation of a common sense notion of inequality, within which moral action must be undertaken, is actively constructed and disseminated in the texts based upon a specifically neoliberal ideology.

My research into this aspect of the *Harry Potter* books is indicative of a critical need to re-assess the cultural impact of fantasy, and particularly narratives of magic, in a neoliberal global community, where a complacent acceptance of economic and political hierarchies has had deeply detrimental impacts. It is the narrative metaphor of magic as an abstract, enigmatic force which simultaneously regulates socio-political life, which make it possible to frame certain moral conceptions in books which largely shift narrative attention away from the fact that 'political power, properly so called, is merely the organising power of one class for oppressing another' (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto* 32). While narratives of oppression do arise in the texts, the hierarchy itself is kept intact through a depiction of the wizard/muggle communities as not politico-economic classes, but ontological 'others' through an organic, unknowable process which cannot be transformed into individual action.

This overarching status quo, and the deeply embedded neoliberal principles it transmits, regulates and structures the troublingly contingent, complacent, and atomised visions of empowerment, morals, and autonomy, as have been discussed for the global readership of *Harry Potter*. The importance of literature and affectively optimistic narratives is central to neoliberal culture; as Betty Joseph argues, literary narratives have often been employed to disseminate a new and dynamic neoliberal worldview of individual autonomy which ‘seemingly repairs the split geography of uneven development, class divisions, and political interests by unleashing the forces of entrepreneurship and competition’ (“Allegory” 69). This narrative optimism is of particular importance to children’s literature and fantasy, which necessitates a scholarship into how the fantasy narrative has been co-opted and employed to perpetuate neoliberal conceptions of freedom and moral life, which are powerful precisely because of their configuration in deeply appealing, emotionally inspiring narratives of triumph. While the ideological strategies utilised in fantasy, and their effect on narrative conservatism/subversion, have received a rich critical attention, my research offers a sustained analysis of a globally popular series as a distinctly neoliberal fantasy. I believe this research can lead to an understanding of how 21st century quest fantasy can be used as one of the most efficient cultural media for the propagation of neoliberal values. I believe the perspectives I have focused on in my research can help highlight this central role of children’s magical fantasy in perpetuating the widespread cultural conception of the ‘invisible hand’ of the status quo, and can facilitate further research which focuses on how this genre, exemplified by *Harry Potter*, can participate in the

neoliberal cultural reconfiguration of individual moral values along largely
atomised, complacent, and contingent perceptions

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