

# Man vs beast the human-animal boundary in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series

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Man vs Beast: The Human-Animal Boundary in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series

by

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in English  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
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at the University of Central Florida  
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## **ABSTRACT**

In her series of seven novels, Rowling constructs a society and a framework of characterization that allows her to explore the human-animal boundary in a variety of ways. She connects her novels to the ideology of the classical and medieval periods while still acknowledging the ways that the relationship between humans and animals has changed over the years by showcasing the influence of modern popular culture on her characterization of the human-animal boundary. Through her descriptions of werewolves, Patronuses, Animagi, and Harry Potter's and Lord Voldemort's abilities to speak Parseltongue, Rowling uses classical, medieval, and modern animal symbolism to showcase her characters' personalities. These human-animal frameworks associate particular imagery with each character, and this imagery highlights the core of the character. By using this symbolism to showcase her characters' deepest characteristics, Rowling also delineates her heroes and villains through their relationships with the boundary between humans and animals.

This thesis analyzes the ways that Rowling's fusion of classical, medieval, and modern animal symbolism contributes to Rowling's characterization of heroes and villains throughout the series. By examining the instances where characters engage the human-animal boundary, this thesis constructs an argument that highlights the fluidity of the human-animal boundary through examples from the series and analysis of Rowling's characters.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Despite its place in the forefront of modern popular culture, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series shares many themes with the literature of the Classical period and the Middle Ages while still acknowledging the influence of modern popular culture media, including films. One of the most apparent of these shared themes is the relationship between humanity and nature expressed through an exploration of human and animal nature. Rowling's depiction of the human-animal boundary in the *Harry Potter* series connects her novels to the literature and beliefs of the classical and medieval periods as well as to modern films. Rowling constructs this boundary between humans and animals in the existence of werewolves, Patronuses, Animagi, and Harry Potter's and Lord Voldemort's ability to speak Parseltongue. This theoretical construct has remained in flux throughout history. Beginning in the Classical period, ambiguity between human and animal nature continued through the Middle Ages when many cities and towns were built in close proximity to the wilderness and many people regularly came into contact with animal nature in one form or another. Several ancient, medieval, and contemporary authors, including Rowling, suggest that the boundary between human and animal nature, while blurred, remains a resolute construction. Rowling builds upon these ideas by establishing a connection between human and animal nature that allows her characters to flirt with the boundary and to ultimately showcase their core characteristics through their actions within the novels.

Through this strategy, Rowling also highlights the elements and themes of popular culture that have influenced her depiction of the human-boundary. While many of her themes derive from the Classical period and the Middle Ages, Rowling also includes many ideas from

popular culture including literature and film. Her use of such modern influences highlights the current status of humanity's relationship with the animal nature that resides within each of us. While in classical mythology and fables and in the literature of the early Middle Ages people understood animal nature as distinct from human nature, later societies began to see this relationship as a spectrum in which humans could move through stages of connection to animal nature. As Joyce E. Salisbury states in her examination of human-animal relationships in the Middle Ages, "the predominant relationship between people and animals during the early centuries was concrete . . . . This changed in the twelfth century, which coincided with the beginnings of increased ambiguity between people and animals" (114). Because medieval people could not control the wilderness, they feared this component of their reality; however, around the twelfth century a proliferation of literature including hybrid creatures (werewolves as seen in the epic *William of Palerne*, the mock epic *Ysengrimus*, and Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, all written in the twelfth century) and creatures who transform from one form to another (as seen in the popularity of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* in the twelfth century) began to point toward a shift in popular thought about the human-animal relationship (Salisbury 161). By expounding upon the idea of metamorphosis that began in the classical age and was reinvigorated in the Middle Ages, Rowling uses her novels to showcase how classical and medieval ideas remain a significant part of the evolving relationship between humans and animals as well as how modern ideas influence our ever-changing perception of this relationship.

Additionally, in the representation of this boundary, Rowling's series engages the theoretical paradigm of the constructed "other." The Ministry of Magic, the dominant, normative power structure within the series, continually oppresses and attempts to control those

with a connection to the animal. Harry realizes this for himself when he enters the Ministry of Magic in the seventh novel and encounters the statue depicting pureblood witches and wizards literally standing on top of Muggles, creatures, and animals (*DH* 242). Viewing the relationship between humans and animals in this way allows those who become animal or have a connection to animal nature to become the constructed “other.” They stand beyond the limits of the normative power structure and, according to Rowling’s society, set up a binary conflict between normal civilization and something inherently primal and threatening. Members of the Ministry of Magic work diligently to maintain their superiority and to appease their fear that the marginalized “other” (as represented by a descent into animal nature and the wilderness) may eventually expose them to the Muggle world.

The structure of Rowling’s social order connects her works to older societies. Stemming from early interpretations of the Bible and Christianity, people believed in humanity’s dominion over animals as stated in Genesis: “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings . . . to have dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, all wild animals on land, and everything that creeps on the earth’” (Genesis 1:26). As Esther Cohen observes, “perhaps the most common perception of animals in western learned culture was based upon the story of creation” (60). Despite the seemingly chaotic quality of nature and the animal kingdom, Genesis suggested that the universe maintains a distinct hierarchy and that, as A. G. Pluskowski says, “humanity was the crown of creation, destined to rule over nature and use it for its own ends” (*Wolves* 14; Cohen 60). These ideas survived into the Middle Ages when much of medieval society remained constantly fearful of the unknown that existed in the wildness of animal nature, and “medieval thinkers repeatedly defined humanity by trying to establish a clear boundary

between humans and animals” (Salisbury, “Human Beasts” 9). They saw the world as it was described in Genesis: a world in which “God placed humans at the top of [a] cosmic hierarchy and designated animals to serve them” (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 14).

Medieval thinkers’ perceptions of the world stemmed from the Bible. Aristotle posited a vision of the universe in which a specific order of intelligences created a theoretical boundary between human rationality and animal wildness. Aristotelian scholar, Seyyed Nasr, explains Aristotle’s ideas: “there is thus a purposeful order to the processes of nature in a well-ordered cosmos made intelligible by the Unmoved Mover” (88). In the Middle Ages, Saint Thomas Aquinas reinforced humanity’s position as ranking higher than that of animals. In his *Summa Theologica*, he “reaffirmed the differences between humans and animals on the basis of rational thought” (Pluskowski *Wolves* 16). Aquinas argued:

Now all animals are naturally subject to man . . . . For just as in the generation of things we perceive a certain order of procession of the perfect from the imperfect . . . so also is there order in the use of natural things . . . . Therefore it is in keeping with the order of nature, that man should be master over animals. (“Question Twenty-Three” 510)

He further explains:

Now we may consider four things in man: his reason, which makes him like the angels; his sensitive powers, which make him like the animals; his natural powers, which make him like the plants; and the body itself, wherein he is like inanimate things. Now in man reason has the position of a master and not of a subject. (“Question Twenty-Three” 511)

Echoing these statements, Cohen explains this medieval Christian view of the human-animal boundary:

Animals, therefore, were clearly distinguished as different from human beings, any attempt to breach the impassable theological and physical barriers [awakened] all the associations of impurity commonly attendant upon such blurring of boundaries . . . . The animal kingdom, in learned tradition, was thus inferior to human beings and unalterably different. (61)

Through arguments such as these, medieval society came to view rationality as the defining characteristic of humanity and “began to clearly differentiate animals from humans . . . on the basis of their lack of intellect or ‘reason’” (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 14). This division allowed humans who descend into bestial states to become “other.”

The society within Rowling’s series acts in much the same way. The Ministry of Magic requires all witches and wizards who cross the constructed human-animal boundary to register their identities and also builds a hierarchical structure. Laws controlling the actions, behaviors, and employment opportunities of those known to have a connection to animal nature pervade the magical world, and the social hierarchy enforces them. For instance, Professor Lupin, a werewolf, must resign from his teaching post once word spreads that he is not fully human. He knows that parents “will not want a werewolf teaching their children,” regardless of the circumstances (*PA* 309). A werewolf represents a breach in the boundary between humans and animals, and, therefore, poses a threat to society. In this way, Rowling not only develops a society that continually oppresses the “other” and the animal while supporting the dominance of

pureblood wizards and witches but also highlights the fact that such societies have existed throughout time. Her representation of a similarly hierarchical society, while seemingly modern, has its foundations in Classical and medieval paradigms. While the idea of humans having dominion over animals arose in the ancient world based on the Bible, human society has continually oppressed the other in many forms. Rowling builds upon many of the themes and motifs of classical and medieval animal lore, symbolism, and literature in her exploration of the human-animal boundary.

Through their actions, her characters remind us that all humans have elements of animal nature within them. Just as medieval people laid the foundation that “time and again . . . used animals to symbolize human traits – in literature,” we continue to employ animals as human exemplars and accept their uses as symbols of human characteristics (Cohen 60). Like depictions of humans and animals throughout time that “show an awareness of the animal that is within each of us,” Rowling’s depictions of her characters suggest that humans maintain a universal and innate connection to animal nature (Salisbury 160). As Salisbury argues about medieval literature, “sometimes the animal traits were undesirable ones – lust, cannibalism, or violence. At other times, animal traits like strength or cunning were sought out” (Salisbury 160). Many authors saw, and still see, “humans as a mingling of both animal and human,” and Rowling uses this belief in the interconnectedness of human and animal nature to allow her characters’ truest human characteristics to shine through their animal forms (Salisbury 160).

## CHAPTER TWO: WEREWOLVES

Like Classical mythology and the literature of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Rowling's novels include a number of hybrid creatures, including werewolves. Phillip A. Bernhardt-House examines the werewolf's position in society over the years and concludes that the werewolf's "hybridity and transgression of species boundaries in a unified figure is, at the very least, unusual" (159). The wizarding world's strong aversion to werewolves highlights the werewolf's position as a constructed other. Rosemary Ross Johnston argues that "'the other' has come to refer to the axis of relationship, discursively produced, between some sort of commonly accepted cultural norm and that which is not of the norm" (45). As evidenced by the reaction to Professor Remus Lupin, werewolves are both feared and mistrusted in Rowling's world. When Harry, Ron, and Hermione question why Lupin's defense of Sirius as an innocent man will not impress the Minister of Magic in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Dumbledore explains: "'Werewolves are so mistrusted by our kind that [Lupin's] support will count for very little'" (PA 392). In this way, the Ministry of Magic represents the normative power structure within the *Harry Potter* series, and it comes as no surprise that the dominant, normative culture would find fault with Lupin.

Lupin, a werewolf, cannot integrate into society because the Ministry of Magic drafts legislation that relegates werewolves to the outskirts of society such as the werewolf ban created through the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures (PA) and the Guidelines for the Treatment of Non-wizard Part-Humans (GF 147). Johnston argues that "otherness – alterity – refers to those who have been excluded from positions of power, marginalized, and denied voice" (45). Werewolves bridge the border between what is human

and what is animal, and, therefore, must be feared, watched, and controlled. Professor Lupin and Fenrir Greyback, as werewolves, exist as hybrid creatures between Rowling's constructed border of human and animal nature and are therefore made "semi-outcasts" and shunned by society (Bernhardt-House 160).

In the Middle Ages, the wolf inspired a great deal of fear in people. This fear was exacerbated by "the audible howls of wolves" from the depths of the forest, which underscored the idea of the forest as a home to "dangerous beings" (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 71). The wilderness became a peripheral landscape and a home to the peripheral members of society. Werewolves, who have no control over their descent into a wild animal nature, represent a hybridity of nature; they are part animal and part human. For this reason, they "have been understood as somehow 'unnatural' and perversions of the expected order of the cosmos and nature" even in the category of fantastic beasts (Bernhardt-House 163). It is no surprise, then, that fantastical werewolves who ruled imaginings of the night quickly came to be associated with not only the dangers of the forest but also the dangers of spiritual wickedness. Those animals that made their homes in the wilderness incited fear and uncertainty in human minds. As Bernhardt-House says in his discussion of werewolves, "lycanthropy appears like a step not only backward, but downward on the evolutionary scale, into the dirt and excrement of earthly existence, a world both visible and distant from ordinary human operations" (165). In many ways, just as the wilderness was defined by its physical characteristics so, too, were its inhabitants defined by these same characteristics. An example of such creatures, "werewolves have been consistently portrayed as outlaws, not only because they transgress the laws of society and stand outside of its boundaries

but because the ordered logic of society is unable even to account for, classify, or assimilate their existence” (Bernhardt-House 179).

Fear of wolves (begun in part because of their association with the forest) remained a consistent element of medieval life, yet actual interactions with these creatures were very few (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 107). As beast literature became more popular and spread farther throughout the world, medieval society began to discuss another type of wolf: the fairytale wolf, or werewolf. Many fables, legends, and myths of the time included wolf characters or references to werewolves: the story of Saint Bertram’s life (8<sup>th</sup> century), Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* (12<sup>th</sup> century), *William of Palerne* (12<sup>th</sup> century), Nivardus’ *Ysegrimus* (12<sup>th</sup> century), *Little Red Riding Hood* (14<sup>th</sup> century), and many others. Within these tales, the anthropomorphic wolves and werewolves embodied the removal of human rationality in favor of animal wildness.

During the twelfth century, the spread of tales similar to *William of Palerne* and Marie de France’s *lais* ushered in “a revolution in thought called ‘the twelfth-century renaissance’” (Salisbury 128). Animals were increasingly used as human exemplars in beast epics, fables, and bestiaries which “marked a turning point in people’s view of difference between humans and animals” (Salisbury 122, 128). This shift in the idea of humanity’s interaction with animals is reflected in Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* (12<sup>th</sup> century) which introduced the idea of a sympathetic werewolf who can recapture his kind human nature while trapped within the physical form of a wolf. While this story proposed an alternative view of a werewolf’s singular connection to an inherent evil nature, it did little to remove the common belief that a werewolf symbolized an inability to control wild, animal impulses. This depiction of werewolves was strongly reinforced during the same century by the story of *William of Palerne* (12<sup>th</sup> century) in

which a society lives in constant fear of a werewolf attack. Despite the wolf's altruistic motivations and former position as a noble Spanish prince, the vast majority of people he encounters remain terrified of his wolfish nature (*William of Palerne* 3287-88). These fictional fears reveal a deeper societal fear of a werewolf's symbolic meaning – the removal of human rationality and a descent into wildness.

Public fear of wolves in the fourteenth century can be seen in tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood* which again associated wolves with a fearsome and rapacious nature, an animal intent on devouring man. Tales such as these spread quickly through large regions and became a standard way of enforcing proper behavior in children. Parents who wanted their children to stay away from the dark and dangerous forest need only remind them of the little girl who was devoured by a wolf on her way through the woods to ensure their cooperation with the rules. Because wolves posed a potential threat to people for decades before the spread of such tales, “for many people, the big bad wolf of *Little Red Riding Hood* [seems] rooted in the sinister experiences of medieval Europe” (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 94, 5).

Similarly, as Pluskowski states in his analysis of the wolf in literature, “the various sub-categories of beast literature were interconnected by common narrative motifs and animal archetypes,” and the wolf survived as a recurring theme throughout many medieval works (*Wolves* 119). This phenomenon of literary motifs further reiterates the fact that literature reflects societal views and underscores the importance of literary symbols such as the werewolf. As Pluskowski argues, “the attributes of wolves found throughout beast literature are likely to have been closely related to those of wolves in folklore” (*Wolves* 119). Through these tales, one can see that despite representations of characters who are able to assert their positive human

qualities through the physical guise of an animal form, the medieval fear of wolves and, later, werewolves sprung from a fear of human descent into the violence of animal nature, a fear that represented the removal of human rationality in favor of animal wildness. Through these texts, medievalists see the appearance and increasing popularity of hybrid creatures. Salisbury graphed the appearance of hybrid creatures in the Middle Ages and asserts that in this spike in popularity in human-animal hybrids, “we can see yet another indication of the blurring of the lines between humans and animals in the medieval imagination after the twelfth century” (129). As Angela Weisl explains, “culture . . . constructs itself out of a blending of ‘orature’ and literature, out of symbolic images that tell stories and convey meanings, and out of texts, past and present, in which those stories are preserved” (7). In this way, we can see Rowling’s acknowledgement of ancient and medieval paradigms and understand her series as a representation of “the persistence of medievalism . . . found in contemporary culture” (Weisl 10).

As werewolves both Greyback and Lupin are hybrid creatures; however, although both Greyback and Lupin are seen as untrustworthy criminals by other wizards in the *Harry Potter* series, only Greyback embodies this characteristic in both his animal and human forms. Serving as a connection to the medieval, Greyback engenders an image of the clichéd wolf character within medieval tales. One of these tales, the mock-epic, “*Ysengrimus*, also the longest of the Latin beast poems, composed in the middle of the twelfth century” (situating it as a contemporary to both Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* and the anonymous *William of Palerne*), presents Ysengrimus as “the clichéd killer wolf” to which the only response is “utter hatred provoking complete extermination” (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 120, 1).

Ysengrimus embodies the physical aspects of such a creature, and “in the poem, the focus is on the wolf’s blind predatory greed” (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 120). Not only is Ysengrimus represented as a stupid animal, he also represents the greed that informed medieval society’s negative reaction to wolves. Ysengrimus is continually described through his physical characteristics, including a depiction of his “jaws as immense and monstrous to the point where they seem to take on a life of their own” (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 120). Nivardus writes:

Concutit inde quater dentes, sonuere coicti,

Ut super incudem bractea tunsa sonat.

“Ne uereare! meo quos”, inquit, ‘in ore ligones

Cernis ebent usu et tempore, nilque secant”. . . .

Hospita non audet Reinardus in ora salire;

Precipites durum sepe tulere diem.

Vix quoque, quin quamuis passim iubeatur inire,

Ter mallet noctes octo cubare foris;

Nam recolens olim mordendo gnara fuisse

Ora lupi, nondum credit ebere satis –

Si nequeant mordere, putat quassantia saltem.<sup>1</sup> (I.79-82, 91-97)

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<sup>1</sup> “So he clashed his teeth together four times, and they rang as they clashed, just as a beaten sheet of metal rings on the anvil. “Don’t be afraid! The mattocks you see in my mouth are blunt with use and age and cut nothing” . . . . Reynard did not dare jump into the hospitable mouth (rash people have often had a nasty fate), and though he had just been and was continually being ordered to enter, he would rather have dosed down outside for four and twenty nights. For, reflecting that the wolf’s jaws were once expert in biting, he did not believe they had got blunt enough. If they couldn’t bite, he thought they could at least squash him flat.” (Mann 211)

Nivardus explains that Ysengrimus' jaws lay open as wide as a gaping doorway. Additionally, Nivardus focuses on the wolf's voracious appetite and massive stomach to emphasize the greed that drives his character:

Celeris mens erat, alius iners.  
Ederat et biberat plus iure et largis usu,  
Ut grauido illisam uentre causret humum;  
Vertebro costisque super surgentia palmum  
Ilia preduro durius utre rigent,  
Sicque urgent cutis stomacho superauerat, ut non  
Tota licet densis esset operta pilis.<sup>2</sup> (IV. 78-84)

Reflecting on Nivardus' depiction of Ysengrimus' swollen stomach, Pluskowski explains that the wolf's enormous stomach is as grotesque as his gaping jaws and large teeth:

Ysengrimus' stomach is equally monstrous. Following the wolf's gluttonous feasting in book IV his stomach swells so much that not only does it dent the ground beneath him, but it completely swallows up his limbs, rendering the wolf completely spherical so he could only move by rolling. (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 121)

Rowling's depiction of Greyback, though not as extreme, brings to mind a similar picture in readers' minds. He assumes the familiar role of wolf and werewolf from medieval literature,

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<sup>2</sup> "His mind moved fast, but his belly was immobilized. He had eaten and drunk more than he should, and more generously than usual, so that he was making a hollow in the ground under the impact of his laden belly. His flanks, rising a span's width above his hip bone and ribs, were even harder than his drum tight belly, and his skin, under pressure from his stomach, had expanded to such an extent that it was only partially covered by his hairs, even though they were thickly set." (Mann 369)

reinforcing the common negative views of werewolves in many texts. Wolves were often depicted as greedy and monstrous, and their authors, like Nivardus, generally focused on grotesque depictions of their physical features. Rowling's treatment of Greyback follows a similar pattern. As she describes, Greyback is a "big, rangy man with matted gray hair and whiskers, . . . a rasping bark of a voice . . . a powerful mixture of dirt, sweat, and, unmistakably, of blood coming from him . . . long yellowish nails . . . pointed teeth . . . [and] blood [trickling] down his chin" (*HBP* 593). His physical form, even when untransformed, mirrors that of a ravenous, bloodthirsty wolf. Harry mistakes Greyback for an animal during the battle at Hogwarts in *Deathly Hallows*: "A gray blur that Harry took for an animal sped four-legged across the hall to sink its teeth into one of the fallen" (*HBP* 646). Even as a human, Greyback takes on the physical appearance and characteristics of a wolf, and such an appearance fits his savage personality. In this way, Rowling's depiction of Greyback as a stereotypical greedy and grotesque werewolf reflects the same clichéd physical characteristics seen in the title character of the *Ysengrimus*. Though we see through the characterization of Greyback as a fearsome villain that Rowling did not situate Greyback as a direct reflection of the comic Ysengrimus, the monstrous physical parallels remain clear; wolves are depicted as terrible, voracious, greedy creatures. As Weisl states, "this one-to-one equivalence sets limits around connections, producing a dictionary of prescriptive definitions. However, because . . . symbols also [conjure] up a series of stories or meanings, they enable a kind of mobility as well" (6).

Rowling's depiction of wolves acknowledges this mobility of the wolf as a literary motif through its connection to several elements of wolf lore. The fables of Odo of Cheriton, who wrote in the thirteenth century, include depictions of wolves that once again align wolves with

negative human qualities. In “The Stork and the Wolf,” Odo uses a wolf to depict a selfish lord who refuses to share his fortunes (Odo of Cheriton 77). In two additional fables, “The Wolf ‘Takes Care of’ the Sheep” and “The Wolf and the Lamb Who Were Drinking,” Odo again uses a wolf as a proxy for “corrupt men” (Odo of Cheriton 95). The wolf in the first fable devours sheep in his care, and the wolf of the latter fable devours a lamb for no reason. Through these depictions, Odo highlights the fact that wolves were often cited for their greed and appetite. In all three fables, the wolf creates injustice through either his selfishness or his appetite.

In the *Harry Potter* series, Greyback is known around the wizarding community as a terrible monster who spreads injustice through his terrible acts and savage nature. Lupin explains to Harry that “Fenrir Greyback is, perhaps, the most savage werewolf alive today” (*HBP* 334). Lupin emphasizes the fact that Greyback “regards it as his mission in life to bite and contaminate as many people as possible” (*HBP* 646). His extreme bloodlust and desire to create havoc and despair becomes even more apparent when he is used as an example of werewolves who kill rather than infect. Upon hearing that a young boy who was attacked by a werewolf died, Harry understands that Greyback must have been the wolf who attacked to such savage ends:

“They sometimes kill,” said Ron . . . “I’ve heard of it happening when the werewolf gets carried away.”

“What was the werewolf’s name?” said Harry quickly.

“Well, the rumor is that it was that Fenrir Greyback,” said Hermione.

“I knew it – the maniac who likes attacking kids . . .” said Harry angrily. (*HBP* 473)

Additionally, Greyback chooses to be near potential victims at the time of his transformations to ensure that he has adequate prey. Lupin explains, “At the full moon, [Greyback] positions himself close to his victims, ensuring that he is near enough to strike. He plans it all” (*HBP* 335). This careful planning and deliberate positioning shows Greyback’s conscious desire to embrace a violent animal nature.

Greyback’s selfishness and ravenous appetite distinguish his character. He even attacks beyond the span of the full moon when he is not transformed. Through these actions he submits to his animal nature. When confronting Greyback during the Death Eaters attack on the castle in *Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore questions Greyback’s bloodlust:

“You are attacking even without the full moon now? This is most unusual . . . . You have developed a taste for human flesh that cannot be satisfied once a month?”

“That’s right,” said Fenrir Greyback. (*HBP* 593)

Dumbledore’s comments reinforce the fact that Fenrir Greyback can hardly be considered a man anymore; he has succumbed to his wolfish desires for blood. Even more horrifyingly, Greyback not only attacks to kill through all stages of the lunar cycle, but he also “specializes in children” (*HBP* 334). Showcasing his complete departure from any identification with human wizards, Greyback’s selfish desire for power leads him to desire a werewolf army full of “enough werewolves to overcome the wizards” (*HBP* 334). He no longer counts himself among humans and instead plots to “overcome” them.

Greyback is characterized not only by his animalistic appearance and voracious greed but also by his desire for material gain. He joins Voldemort’s followers because he is no longer

welcome in society and embodies the worst qualities of the Death Eater mentality. Other Death Eaters repeatedly recall his past predatory crimes (many involving children), and Greyback remains the one called upon to perform Lord Voldemort's cruel tasks. When Harry meets Greyback in the woods in *Deathly Hallows*, he immediately recognizes the savage werewolf: "He [Harry] knew who this was: Fenrir Greyback, the werewolf who was permitted to wear Death Eater robes in return for his hired savagery" (*DH* 447). In becoming wolf, Greyback denies his remaining humanity and embraces his new animalistic nature. The worst of his human characteristics, violence and greed, are amplified, and he becomes a monster, taking on the physical form of a wolf and allowing animal nature to consume him.

For example, in *Deathly Hallows*, Greyback is among the snatchers who find Harry and his friends in the forest.<sup>3</sup> For the first time, readers see Greyback temporarily restrain his animal desire to devour children. Rather than killing Harry, Greyback decides to take him to Voldemort. As Salisbury argues about medieval depictions of wolves, "the heart of the problem with the wolf was greed" (130). Rowling uses Greyback to carry this problem into the twenty-first century. Voldemort promised the person who managed this task a reward, and Greyback does not want to lose his claim on the prize: "To hell with the Ministry . . . They'll take the credit, and we won't get a look in" (*DH* 453). He suppresses the desire to consume Harry and his friends to achieve greater personal gain. At first glance, this appears as an instance of Greyback's asserting his humanity: he is an animal relinquishing his hold on prey. This instance, however points to Greyback's extreme greed. He withholds his devouring of Harry and his

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<sup>3</sup> After the Ministry of Magic falls under Voldemort's rule in *Deathly Hallows*, Death Eaters begin hunting those who evade the Ministry's arrest warrants. As Ron explains, "They're everywhere – gangs trying to earn gold by rounding up Muggle-borns and blood traitors, there's a reward from the Ministry for everyone captured... Some of them are supposed to be as bad as Death Eaters" (*DH* 382).

friends only to have more later. Greyback knows that he will be able to eat Harry's friends after turning them in for a monetary reward. By momentarily restraining his appetite, Greyback increases his payoff. He wants the largest "meal" available to him which includes flesh and money in this case. Driven by these desires, Greyback clearly aligns with the greedy and the villainous. As *Ysengrimus* and the fables of Odo of Cheriton prove, wolves were "shown as evil, greedy, gluttonous, murderous [thieves]," and many "[were] dissatisfied with [their] lot in society and wanted more" (Salisbury 130). Greyback behaves in much the same way. He cares only for himself, and his connection to wild animal nature highlights his desire to pursue such selfish interests. Wolves' instincts lead them to prey just as Greyback's desire for personal advancement and pleasure drives him to attack and harm others.

In addition to these connections to medieval ideology and literature, the influence of popular culture on Rowling's portrayal of werewolves is evident. Depictions of werewolves in popular culture have evolved over the years. In the 1941 film *Wolfman*, werewolfism is described as "an affliction of the mind," a version of schizophrenia in which the dual personalities represent good and evil in a man's soul. In this situation, the wolf embodies his evil. Although the werewolves in *Wolfman* display greed, their bloodlust targets specific victims. This movie suggests that werewolves cannot be redeemed from their animal condition. The werewolf in question, Larry Talbot, is not saved by his love for Gwen, the woman he loves, nor can he save Gwen herself.

Through her characterization of Professor Lupin, Rowling breaks free from the pre-twelfth-century idea of werewolves as criminals and allows Lupin to assume a sympathetic role, much like Marie de France's Bisclavret and William of Palerne's Alphonse. Marie de France's

Bisclavret is presented as a kind gentleman who is deceived and tricked by his evil wife. Although forced into the physical form of a wolf, he proves to the king that he can overcome his animal nature, and the members of the court recognize his positive human characteristics. Similarly, *William of Palerne*'s werewolf, Alphonse, uses his animal characteristics to help William and Melior find safe passage through the land. In much the same way, Lupin becomes a hero by the end of the *Harry Potter* series despite the fact that he is a werewolf. Because the Wolfsbane Potion had not yet been invented when Lupin, James, Sirius, and Pettigrew were at school, Lupin "became a fully fledged monster once a month"; there was no cure for werewolfism (PA 353). Lupin lost his sense of his humanity when he transformed and descended into a state which is, as medievalist Charlotte Otten describes in her overview of werewolf nature in Western literature, "unacceptable or unfathomable in human conduct" (4). Lupin's transformation into a werewolf strips him of his human characteristics and personality. He unwillingly becomes a wolf in form and mind.

In his untamed, untreated werewolf form, Lupin resembles descriptions of bloodthirsty, medieval predators. He explains to Harry, Ron, and Hermione, "My transformations in those days were – were terrible. It is very painful to turn into a werewolf. I was separated from humans to bite, so I bit and scratched myself instead" (PA 353). In those days, Lupin had little trace of his humanity left when he became a wolf, and he feared that his friends, the only aspect of his life he valued, "would desert [him] the moment they found out what [he] was" (PA 354). He worried that the widespread and common fear of uncontrollable animalistic behavior would turn his friends against him if he could not maintain control over his wild animal nature.

Although most medieval depictions of wolves treat the animals as evil or dangerous predators, several Christian sources showcase “instances of ‘good’ wolves associated with saints” (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 167). In this way, medieval Christian society suggests that the dark side of wolfish nature can be overcome with outside help. In the Middle Ages, help came in the form of divine intervention; in Professor Lupin’s case within the *Harry Potter* series, help comes from friendship. With the help of saints and divine power, many wolves in medieval Christian stories subdue their wild tendencies and rise above their aggressive, murderous nature. For example, Pluskowski explains that “in Jonas the Monk’s *Life of Columba*, the power of God is demonstrated by the unusual behavior of the wolves in leaving the saint alone in the woods,” and in the story of St. Edmund, the saint “is killed and beheaded but his head is protected by a wolf . . . although the wolf was ravenous and hungry, under the watchful eye of God, it dared not eat the head” (*Wolves* 169). These descriptions of wolves shed light on the fact that even wolves with no connection to human rationality managed to subdue violent animal nature through the help of an external force. Because werewolves are humans who become wolves and devolve into an animal state, we can see these medieval wolves’ ability to suppress their violent nature mirrored in Lupin’s ability to suppress his violent werewolf nature.

Lupin’s friends act as a powerful external force allowing his transformations to become “not only bearable, but the best times of [his] life” (*PA* 354). As Lupin says, “a werewolf is only a danger to people”; Lupin’s friends “couldn’t keep [him] company as humans, so they kept [him] company as animals” (*PA* 354). By doing so, they enabled Lupin to regain his humanity even though he still physically transformed into a wolf. He was less of a threat because he remembered his human nature when he had his friends to rely on. Lupin explains the effect that

James, Sirius, and Peter's company had upon him when he transformed: "Under their influence, I became less dangerous. My body was still wolfish, but my mind seemed to become less so while I was with them" (PA 355). Lupin's ability to overcome his instinctual animal nature as a werewolf and to reassert his humanity comes from his friends' external influences. They must become animal to help Lupin remember he is human.

Through her description of this relationship, Rowling upholds the medieval idea that werewolves are able to subdue their ferocious animal nature with outside help, but she also alters the mechanics of this possibility: Lupin never receives divine power. He needs only the company of his friends, their loyalty to him, and their abilities to cross the human-animal boundary along with him to overcome the animal within himself. Again, Rowling asserts that the boundary between what is human and what is animal, while fluid, remains distinct. Lupin, although he is a werewolf, finds his humanity in his human friendships with James Potter, Sirius Black, and Peter Pettigrew. He overcomes the animal side of his condition under their watchful eyes and with their support. Non-human medieval wolves required divine intervention in order to do so, but because Lupin maintains a grasp on his human rationality when he transforms, he succeeds with only the aid of his friends.

Looking at Rowling's more contemporary influences, audiences see that her depiction of Lupin as a werewolf able to control himself in the presence of the friends that he loves departs from the depiction of modern werewolves who do not share this trait. In both the 1941 *Wolfman* and the 1981 film *An American Werewolf in London*, the inflicted cannot save themselves. In the early *Wolfman*, hunters kill Larry Talbot after he devours the woman he loves. Even her love was not enough to save him from his descent into animal violence. Similarly, policemen shoot

David Kessler at the end of *An American Werewolf in London*. Even though David's love interest Alex Price attempts to calm him, David cannot control his werewolf nature enough to save his life and to assimilate into human society once again. Both Larry Talbot and David Kessler die as a result of their inability to overcome the violence of animal nature despite the help of their friends and lovers. Lupin is the only werewolf of these three to receive aid from friends in *animal* form and, therefore, the only one able to overcome a werewolf's instincts. In the final novel of the *Harry Potter* series, Lupin sacrifices his life in the battle against Voldemort so that others (including his own son) will have a better life in the future. Werewolf films showcase the different depictions of werewolves in popular culture. Many are a mildly terrifying threat unable to be redeemed while others embody greed and bloodlust (more akin to Ysengrimus than Bisclavret or Alphonse, or Greyback rather than Lupin) and a possibility for redemption through friendship and love.

Professor Lupin overcomes the worst of his animalistic nature and reasserts his humanity. Although he, too, is shunned by society at large, Lupin minimizes the threat he poses to others. He recognizes and understands his uncertain place within society and acknowledges the fact that he must remove himself from human company when he transforms into a werewolf: “[Parents] will not want a werewolf teaching their children, Harry. And . . . I see their point. I could have bitten any of you. . . . That must never happen again” (PA 423). Lupin learns to maintain his human characteristics even while trapped within the physical form of a wolf. He becomes less and less dangerous, and, with the help of the Wolfsbane potion, becomes a “tame werewolf” (PA 359). In this way, Lupin, unlike Greyback, successfully overcomes his animal nature and maintains both his human rationality and his human sympathy.

Rowling's analysis of these characters extends beyond their own personalities. Looking again at medieval depictions of werewolves, we see that werewolves were never truly accepted by anyone in society. In their respective tales, Bisclavret and Alphonse are welcomed back to society only after they have successfully transformed to fully human states again. Although Alphonse's background and true identity are revealed while he remains an animal, the people rejoice for him only after Queen Brande releases the spell that traps him in a wolf's body and returns him to his human form: (*William of Palerne* 7730-57). Before this reversal of the animal occurs, members of society remain distrustful of and unsure about his true nature. Similarly, in Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, the people only accept Bisclavret entirely after he has been restored to his human form (Marie de France).

In the *Harry Potter* series, however, Rowling allows both her hero characters and her readers to understand that Lupin's humanity runs deeper than his connection to animal nature. Only Hermione originally understands that Professor Lupin is a werewolf because he so easily hides this reality behind his genuine and altruistic nature. Although most of society remains fearful of werewolves and shuns Professor Lupin once his animal nature is revealed, Harry and his friends adopt a more open-minded stance. They accept Lupin based on his merits and look beyond the fact that he is part-animal. They see the humanity beneath the animal. Because Harry accepts the fact that Lupin is a werewolf yet maintains a strong relationship with him, Lupin is able to become a hero. He helps Harry overcome dementors (*Prisoner of Azkaban*), attempts to shield his wife and child from the hardships of his condition (*Half-Blood Prince*), and offers to accompany Harry on his quest for Horcruxes (*Deathly Hallows*). Lupin overcomes the role of helpless victim who is tied to the physicality and wildness of a wolf and manages to

actively suppress the animal within him. Dumbledore accepts Lupin without question, and although skeptical at first when they still assume he is working with Sirius Black to murder Harry, Harry, Ron, and Hermione quickly follow Dumbledore's lead even though Lupin remains a werewolf until he dies. In this way, Rowling's characterizations of werewolves not only support the standard early medieval view of these creatures as wild, dangerous, and voracious but also embrace an alternative viewpoint that supersedes even the few positive medieval depictions of werewolves.

These depictions showcase Rowling's ability to fuse medieval and modern influences in her characterization of both her heroes and villains. Greyback, one of the most fearsome villains in the series, reminds readers of the clichéd savagery of the medieval wolf Ysengrimus and the selfishness of the wolves in Odo of Cheriton's fables while following the pattern of the 1941 Wolfman who could not be saved from his condition. On the other hand Lupin, who becomes a hero in the *Harry Potter* series, follows the medieval Christian idea that werewolves can be saved from their afflictions through external forces and gives his life to save those he loves. As evidenced, Rowling's use of animal imagery and transformation within her *Harry Potter* series cannot be classified as simply medieval or modern. As Weisl says, "efflorescence of medievalism in popular assumption . . . makes that call, showing the Middle Ages not just with us but with significant claims upon what we think is inherently modern" (4). Rowling infuses both elements and all time periods into her characterizations and depictions of werewolves as hybrid creatures, yet she also acknowledges that often times humans consciously choose to interact with animal nature on a substantial level.

## CHAPTER THREE: PATRONUSES

While werewolves cannot choose whether or not to descend into animal nature, Rowling's series contains several characters who consciously summon animal manifestations of their human qualities. Rowling experiments with her construction of the boundary between humans and animals in this way through her description of Patronuses. As stated earlier, medieval society defined its humanity against animal nature, but in her *Harry Potter* series, Rowling consistently utilizes animals and symbolic animal characteristics to showcase the very core of her characters. Her characters, who summon Patronuses, see their deepest qualities and true human nature reflected in these animal manifestations of their souls. In this way, Rowling enables the distinction between her heroes and her villains to shine through the heroes' abilities to cast a Patronus that embodies their inherent positive essences.

A Patronus constitutes advanced and powerful magic that requires control over both one's emotions and one's fear. As previously stated, a Patronus is a positive force that takes the form of an animal and protects the caster from the powers of Dementors; as Lupin explains to Harry, "It is called the Patronus Charm . . . when it works correctly, it conjures up a Patronus . . . which is a kind of anti-dementor – a guardian that acts as a shield between you and the dementor" (*PA* 237). In the series Dementors represent evil or madness incarnate. They feed on hope and happiness while spreading despair and hopelessness; Lupin further explains that "dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them" (*PA* 187). The word Dementor comes from the roots "dement" which means "to

drive mad; make insane” and “tormentor” meaning “one who afflicts with great bodily or mental suffering” (“Dement,” def.; “Tormetor,” def.). Putting these two halves together creates a definition of the word “dementor” that means “one who creates insanity through the infliction of great suffering,” or in other words “one who inflicts insanity.” Through this logic, one can see that Dementors are in essence a strong catalyst for insanity or madness. As such, the Dementors serve as excellent guards for the wizard prison Azkaban. Lupin explains to Harry, “They don't need walls and water to keep the prisoners in, not when they're trapped inside their own heads, incapable of a single cheerful thought. Most go mad within weeks” (PA 188). As Rowling describes, Dementors “sort of freeze [one's] insides” (PA 97). Feared by nearly every member of the wizarding community and unconsciously felt by Muggles, Dementors spread insanity and madness through the world. Lupin explains:

Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself...soulless and evil. You'll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life. (PA 187)

Marshals of despair and madness, Dementors steal a person's ability to control his emotions. Unlike the witch or wizard who casts an effective Patronus, a Dementor's victim succumbs to the instability of human desolation. Dementors' victims lose all control over their emotions and their ability to use any remaining positivity to create an animal guardian, a Patronus.

A Patronus develops from the core of a person's soul. Those able to cling to positive memories and thoughts while the Dementor attempts to steal their souls have positive cores, and Rowling portrays them as heroes. In this way, Rowling suggests that only her heroes, those who

are inherently good, have the control to summon a Patronus. Without a pure core, or soul, one would be left with no defense against a Dementor's power and would descend into an animal state, unable to maintain human rationality. The only exception to this paradigm is Professor Umbridge. Professor Umbridge remains the only one of Rowling's villains to cast a Patronus. She not only aligns with the evil side in the age-old battle between good and evil but also lacks the genuine goodness of character that supplies the power for a strong Patronus. Professor Umbridge, one of the most well-defined villains in the series, must find her stability and control within the Ministry of Magic, and when the Ministry collapses, her control also fails. Umbridge gains power as an element of the domineering Ministry of Magic which is built upon the oppression of the other and is slowly succumbing to the evil influence of Voldemort.

Because she gains power and control through a corrupt institution and she uses this power and control only to advance her own corrupt agenda, Umbridge cannot be seen as a hero. Her cat Patronus, therefore, highlights her position as a representative of the Ministry of Magic. Cats have long been associated with witchcraft. According to *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, "during the Middle Ages, cats . . . were considered to be witches' animals" (53). In the seventh book of the series, Umbridge casts her Patronus to protect herself while she interrogates innocent people. When Harry, Ron, and Hermione break into the Ministry of Magic to find a Horcrux, Harry notices "a bright-silver, long-haired cat [prowling] up and down" and realizes "it was there to protect the prosecutors from the despair that emanated from the dementors" (*DH* 259). Seeing the cat Patronus draw power from the situation, Harry understands that "the Patronus . . . was Umbridge's, and it glowed because she was so happy here, in her element, upholding the twisted laws she had helped to write" (*DH* 259). It is fitting that Umbridge's

Patronus represents her connection to the Ministry of Magic, the center of witchcraft in Rowling's world. Her Patronus' form underscores the corruptness of her character by aligning her with the corrupt Ministry of Magic.

Beginning in the fifth novel of the series, *The Order of the Phoenix*, the Dementors abandon their posts as guards of Azkaban and join the ranks of Voldemort's followers. They no longer serve the ministry but rather attack at Voldemort's will. Dumbledore explains to the Minister of Magic during Harry's trial, "It means that I think they were ordered there . . . . Of course, these particular dementors may have been outside Ministry control –" (*OP* 146-47). By this point, Rowling has aligned the Dementors with the villains, namely the greatest villain of them all, Voldemort. While Death Eaters have no need to create a Patronus because they exist as allies, Harry and his friends must create Patronuses to find stability in an increasingly chaotic and evil world.

By willingly marching to his death, Harry controls every aspect of his life, even his own mortality. In a similar manner, Snape focuses his love for Lily into a desire to destroy Voldemort. He joins the Order of the Phoenix and controls his thoughts and emotions sufficiently to work as a double agent for years, fooling even Voldemort, the world's most accomplished Legilimens, or mind reader. Through their ability to control the unstable and seemingly uncontrollable elements of their lives and to focus their inherent goodness into the power to summon a Patronus, both Harry and Snape distinguish themselves as heroes. As heroes, both Harry and Snape manage to find the goodness within themselves to create a Patronus, an animal embodiment of their cores that serves as a defense against Dementors. Harry, represented by a stag, assumes a Christ-like role as he becomes the willing martyr for the

salvation of the wizarding world, and Snape, represented by a doe, directs his life down alternate paths in order to honor his love for Lily. Both successfully cast a Patronus and both successfully banish Dementors.

Harry's Patronus is a stag, the same animal that Rowling used to represent Harry's father, James. In ancient Celtic traditions, otherworldly deities sent a white stag to guide chosen humans into an alternative realm (Andrews 263, Colter 41). Following this pattern, Harry's stag Patronus becomes a guide for him as soon as he learns to conjure it. In his third year, through the aid of a time turner, Harry sees his future self cast a stag Patronus and believes he is seeing his father returned in some form from the realms of the dead: "There's only one thing it could have been, to make the dementors go," said Harry. "A real Patronus. A powerful one . . . I think –" Harry swallowed . . . "I think it was my dad" (PA 406-07). In this way, although his father is not the one to truly cast the spell, Harry's stag Patronus links himself and his father, tying them together and guiding Harry toward his destiny.

In the Middle Ages, allegorical interpretations of animal symbolism based on Christian religions saw the stag as a symbol of Christ (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 195). In the medieval legend of Saint Eustace, Eustace's conversion to Christianity occurs after his encounter with a stag who acts as the messenger of Christ (Salter 65). In this instance, the stag "acts as an agent of divine providence," remaining with Eustace through the most troubling and painful times of his life until he is able to overcome these tribulations and to be reborn through baptism (Salter 65). Throughout Rowling's series Harry summons his Patronus in times of danger. As David Colbert states, "Harry is saved by a spirit – . . . a Patronus – in the form of a stag" (43). Harry's stag Patronus functions in a similar way to Eustace's stag. As Harry's protection against Dementors,

the stag Patronus remains by Harry's side as he is forced to relive the worst moments of his life. It offers Harry comfort and support, allowing him to overcome his most horrific memories. Lupin teaches Harry that "The Patronus is a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the dementor feeds upon – hope, happiness, the desire to survive" (PA 237). Much as Saint Eustace relies on aid from his divine stag, Harry wishes to call upon his stag Patronus to accompany him to his death and rebirth as a new man, but he knows "he ha[s] no strength left for a Patronus" after the long and taxing battle at Hogwarts (DH 697). He, instead, receives aid from the Resurrection Stone that allows specters of his loved ones to "[act] like Patronuses to him" as he walks past the dementors guarding the edge of the Forbidden Forest (DH 700). Harry's reliance on his stag Patronus highlights Rowling's ability to fuse classical, medieval, and modern ideas in her exploration of the human-animal boundary.

As evidence of this fusion, we can look to the ways Rowling's use of stag symbolism is similar to that of C.S. Lewis' in his *Chronicles of Narnia* series. The Pevensie children are destined to save Narnia from the reign of an evil, usurping queen, paralleling Harry's destiny to save the wizarding world in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Once their Narnian destinies have been fulfilled, the Pevensies must begin new lives in London. Lewis introduces a white stag that leads them through the forest and into the realm of their new lives. In this instance the stag becomes a guide through the wilderness of the forest to another land, allowing the Pevensies to return to England safely. Lucy Pevensie understands that the stag is an otherworldly guide, asserting that it will lead them to "strange adventures or else some great change of . . . fortune" (*The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* 186). She understands correctly, for "in folk tales, chasing a stag often leads to an imaginary world or divine place" (Colbert 41). Because "the stag

came to represent Christ leading souls through the darkness,” the Pevensies’ stag guide is able to lead them through the wilderness to a new life, just as Harry’s stag Patronus guides him through his own troubles (Colbert 44).

This imagery shows Harry’s stag Patronus serving as a guide and companion for him as he travels the path to his ultimate destiny. Interestingly, stags have also been commonly represented in opposition to snakes (Werness 131). This image arises in part from the association of snakes with evil in the Bible. As David Colbert states in his discussion of Lewis’ work, “because . . . the snake is associated with Satan, the stag’s ‘war’ against snakes made it a symbol for Christ” (43). In Genesis, a serpent tempts Eve to taste fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. In this version of the creation tale, the serpent represents the Devil as the catalyst for the downfall of man and the introduction of humanity’s original sin. By characterizing Voldemort through a close connection to snakes, Rowling emphasizes Voldemort’s evil nature. Voldemort speaks Parseltongue, threatens others with snakes, befriends a snake, and even takes on the appearance of a snake. Rowling allows Harry’s stag Patronus to represent his allegorical Christ-like role, his death and rebirth, and places Harry in direct opposition to Voldemort. In this way, she revives the dichotomy of stag versus snake and upholds the tradition of stag imagery introduced in the Middle Ages and carried through several centuries of popular culture.

Although the animal symbolism of Harry’s stag Patronus follows closely along the lines of medieval representations of the same beast, Rowling uses this symbolism to showcase the true nature of her characters. As symbolized by his Patronus counterpart, Harry becomes a Christ-like figure through his self-sacrifice and rebirth in the Forbidden Forest. He sacrifices himself willingly so that others may live. Ironically, Harry, who willingly walks to his death, defeats

death itself while Voldemort (literally “flees from death”), who has always tried to escape death’s clutches, meets his fatal match in Harry. Voldemort, who named his followers “Death Eaters” to emphasize his desire to destroy death itself, eventually succumbs to his demise while Harry triumphs over him for the second time. Harry’s willingness to accept what he thought was unbeatable and inescapable enables him to overcome death while Voldemort’s fear of and running from the same brings him to death’s doorstep and beyond. Not only does Harry’s stag Patronus act as a supernatural guardian and guide, it also illuminates his altruistic personality as well as his inevitable destiny.

Professor Snape’s Patronus also highlights his character and destiny. Snape’s Patronus takes the form of a doe in remembrance of Harry’s mother, Lily. Not only does this illustrate the fact that Snape loved Lily Potter, but it also builds upon Rowling’s use of animal symbolism and reasserts the idea of Rowling’s characters’ truest forms of humanity taking animal shapes. Snape joins Voldemort’s Death Eaters as a young man; however, as soon as he realizes Voldemort’s plan to attack Lily, Snape changes his allegiance (*DH* 676-79). He aligns himself with Dumbledore to save Lily’s life, but his efforts are futile. Snape realizes the futility of his actions after Voldemort murders the Potters. He confronts Dumbledore: “‘I thought . . . you were going . . . to keep her . . . safe’ . . . . ‘Gone . . . dead . . .’” (*DH* 678). From this moment Snape’s undying love for Lily Potter, as represented by his doe Patronus, becomes his single most important and strongest characteristic. Snape’s love for Lily directs all of his actions and influences every decision that he makes. When he questions Dumbledore, Snape proves his love for Lily:

From the tip of his wand burst the silver doe . . . .

“After all this time?”

“Always,” said Snape. (*DH* 687)

Harry’s stag Patronus embodies his intense sense of loyalty to his father and his altruistic character just as Snape’s doe Patronus embodies his deep love for Lily.

While the stag was a symbol of independence and Christ, the doe was the ancient pagan symbol of family/motherhood, gentleness, and alternative paths to a goal (Andrews 262-64). Snape’s love for Lily Potter should come as no surprise. Young Snape, who comes from a dysfunctional family and must listen to his parents’ arguments on a daily basis, wishes to befriend the young, gentle witch he notices next door. As the years progress, Snape’s attraction to Lily grew. Not only does young Lily soothe and defend her older sister against young Snape’s taunts, but, as a teenager, she also tries to protect Snape himself from the bullying of James Potter and his friends while at Hogwarts. Later, she dies to protect her only son, Harry, and returns to comfort him and to offer her encouragement in the most trying times of his life. In this way, Snape’s doe Patronus symbolizes his love for Lily. Snape assumes the symbolism of motherhood through his doe Patronus. This role reversal further solidifies Snape’s connection to ancient and medieval imagery.

Similarly, although Snape is rarely seen as a gentle character, his interactions with Lily Potter were, indeed, distinguished by an air of gentleness: he quietly explains magic and Hogwarts to Lily as a child, attempts to distance himself from his Death Eater friends when speaking with Lily at school, and begs Dumbledore to protect her from Voldemort (*DH* 664-68, 673, 677-78). Snape’s gentleness even briefly extends beyond his interactions with Lily.

Although Snape seems to loathe Harry, he also saves his life and protects him from Voldemort. When considering his interactions with Snape, Harry thinks, “Snape definitely loathed him, just as he’d loathed Harry’s father . . . [but] it was true that Snape had saved [Harry’s] life” (*GF* 480). While Snape’s gentleness is not always readily apparent in his treatment of Harry, his Patronus underscores the fact that he truly has his heart, or the core of his being and humanity, in the right place. He comes from an evil background as one of Voldemort’s Death Eaters, but he changes his ways and assumes the role of hero. By the end of the series, Snape has not only ensured that Dumbledore’s final request (that Snape should be the one to kill him in order to protect Draco Malfoy’s untarnished soul) is fulfilled and his motivations for changing his allegiance are revealed. He truly dies a hero, as his Patronus suggests.

Lastly, the doe symbolized a “gentle luring to new adventure” and alternative paths to a goal (Andrews 262). Through this idea, Snape’s Patronus showcases his character beyond his connection to Lily. Having joined the Death Eaters as a young man, Snape later changes his allegiance and joins the Order of the Phoenix. After overhearing the prophecy made about Harry and understanding that Voldemort will hunt down and destroy the woman he loves despite his protests, Snape can no longer serve him. Joining Dumbledore’s cause, Snape attempts to save Lily’s life. Unfortunately for him, Voldemort murders Lily despite Snape’s requests that he spare her life. Understanding this reality, Snape seeks comfort from Dumbledore who informs Snape that the best way to honor Lily’s memory is to help protect her only son, Harry.

Through these changes, Snape’s life follows a path he never foresaw. He intended to become and remain a Death Eater dedicated to Voldemort, but he dies a member of the Order of the Phoenix striving to end Voldemort’s reign. He also desired to protect Lily from Voldemort’s

evil scheme, but he fails and must instead live his life protecting, although reluctantly, her son. Additionally, Snape enables Harry to find the Sword of Gryffindor. Mirroring the “many stories and myths of deer luring hunters or even kings deep into the woods until they are lost and begin to encounter new adventures,” Snape’s doe Patronus leads Harry through the woods to the very item that will begin his new and greatest adventure (Andrews 262). When Harry gives up hope of locating the true Sword of Gryffindor, Snape’s doe Patronus appears and guides Harry through the forest to the resting place of the sword. Harry, unaware that he is following Snape’s Patronus, inherently understands the positive force behind the mysterious doe. Harry recognizes, “It was a silver doe, moon-bright and dazzling . . . . Caution murmured it could be a trick, a lure, a trap. But instinct, overwhelming instinct, told him that this was not Dark Magic” (*DH* 366). He knows that the doe must be a guide and not a threat. As Snape continues down the alternative paths of his own life, he allows Harry to form an alternative plan for destroying Horcruxes by providing the Sword of Gryffindor. Snape’s doe Patronus embodies his deepest desires and realities of existence: the desire for a familial and maternal presence in his life, an air of gentleness, and the ability to accept alternative paths to a goal. In this way, Snape’s Patronus establishes him as one of Rowling’s heroes. Rowling once again cements her characters’ core traits in symbolism carried through time from the Classical period, the Middle Ages, and modern society.

Rowling uses her characters’ Patronuses to highlight their cores and to establish their positions as heroes or villains. Interestingly, only one of Rowling’s villains is ever depicted alongside a Patronus. Harry’s altruistic core shows in his stag Patronus while Snape’s desire for familial and maternal relationships, inner gentleness, and alternate life path show through his doe

Patronus, but notably, Professor Umbridge is the only one of Rowling's villains ever to cast a Patronus. Umbridge showcases her connection to the corrupt Ministry of Magic by producing a cat Patronus that glows brighter as she enforces the Ministry of Magic's cruel legislations. Through her ability to fuse classical and medieval animal symbolism with more modern depictions of the same themes, Rowling asserts that while animals may represent human characteristics, human actions determine the true measure of someone. This fluid relationship between human and animal nature showcases the core characteristics of Harry, Snape, and Umbridge throughout the series in the form of their Patronuses.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ANIMAGI

Just as Rowling showcases her characters' true humanities and paths to heroism through the forms of their Patronuses, she also allows certain characters' abilities to transform into animals to highlight their deepest characteristics. Witches and wizards who can transform into animals at will are called Animagi, and, as Rowling shows, this metamorphosis is not a process taken lightly. The Animagus transformation, a drastic breach in the boundary between humans and animals, takes years to perfect and must be carefully controlled by the Ministry of Magic. As Hermione states when explaining Animagus transformations to Ron and Harry, "It takes years to become an Animagus, and then you have to register yourself and everything" (*GF* 487). Professor McGonagall further explains in one of her Transfiguration classes that the ministry tracks those witches and wizards who can transform into animals. The Animagus transformation involves a level of control over one's animal nature that the Ministry does not believe likely to occur naturally and, therefore, requires both years of training and official registration of all Animagi. Like conjuring the Patronus charm, the Animagus transformation requires control over one's connection to animal nature. As evidenced by the extensive training, control, and strict regulations surrounding Animagi transformations, Rowling maintains her position that, although blurred over time, a definitive boundary between humans and animals exists and uses this structure as well as classical, medieval, and modern animal symbolism to delineate her heroes and villains and showcase her characters' personalities. Although each Animagus character physically changes his or her form into an animal one, he or she maintains a firm grasp on his or her human character and characteristics.

One of the most recognized Animagi in the series, Professor McGonagall transforms herself into a cat with markings around its eyes that match the shape of the glasses she wears, but, even though she is the Transfiguration teacher at Hogwarts and celebrated for her skill in transfigurations, Professor McGonagall cannot perfectly capture animal nature. Professor Dumbledore immediately recognizes her as her human self:

“How did you know it was me?” she asked.

“My dear Professor, I’ve never seen a cat sit so stiffly.” (SS 9)

Professor McGonagall’s actions and very nature reflect her humanity. She cannot erase or escape the fact that she is indeed human, and this impossibility ensures that she never loses consciousness of her human nature and descends into a fully animal state. Rowling’s attitude about crossing the human-animal boundary is evident in Vernon Dursley’s reaction to Professor McGonagall in her feline form. He notices the cat’s strange behaviors, “reading a map,” “sitting on his garden wall” all day, and “[giving] him a stern look,” and classifies them as “something peculiar” (SS 2, 5, 6, 2). He internally questions the cat because it is not behaving as cats are supposed to, or usually, act. Both Professor Dumbledore, who recognizes the breach in the boundary between humans and animals for what it is, and Vernon Dursley, who does not, label Professor McGonagall’s feline nature as abnormal. In this way, McGonagall’s difficulties in transforming believably into a cat highlight the idea that while humans can physically cross the boundary between human and animal, their actions enable them to maintain human rationality. While a cat, McGonagall focuses on the fact that she is on Privet Drive to meet Dumbledore as he delivers infant Harry to his aunt and uncle. She chooses to align with good, and, therefore,

never descends into a wild, animal state. Human choice allows witches and wizards to maintain their human characteristics and personalities while in Animagus form.

Just as Professor McGonagall is able to take the shape of a cat, Sirius Black is able to transform himself at will into “an enormous shaggy black dog” (PA 178). Although Sirius is convincing in this guise to humans, he cannot convince Crookshanks, Hermione’s cat. As he explains to Harry, Ron, and Hermione, “This cat . . . he’s one of the most intelligent of his kind I’ve ever met . . . when he met me, he knew I was no dog” (PA 364). Sirius tricks the entire wizarding and Muggle worlds into believing he is a dog, but he cannot hide his human nature from Crookshanks, a true member of the animal kingdom. Sirius, like Professor McGonagall, chooses to align with the good and never loses his human nature. He maintains his humanity in the form of a dog, and Crookshanks recognizes his human nature.

Sirius Black is defined through his relationships with James, Lily, and Harry. As mentioned, Sirius remains loyal to his friend until the day he dies. He exerts great effort to protect James, Lily, and Harry from Voldemort, including passing the honor of being their Secret Keeper to Peter Pettigrew, believing that this switch would best protect them. After James’ and Lily’s deaths, Sirius devotes his entire life to avenging their murders. Later, he gives his life to save Harry’s. Because of these actions, readers clearly see that Sirius is driven by his deep sense of loyalty to those he loves. This loyalty becomes apparent in Sirius’ Animagus form. As a dog, Sirius embodies the time-honored link between dogs and loyalty that began in the classical period, continued through the Middle Ages, and remains today. As stated, Sirius gives his life to protect Harry when Harry travels to the Department of Mysteries at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix*. Ironically, Harry only entered the Department of Mysteries in an attempt to save

Sirius' life based on a false vision presented by Voldemort, but Sirius loses his life by traveling to the Department himself to protect Harry. As Anne-Sofie Gräslund states, "it is obvious there is a connection between dog and death in the Classical mythology" (5). Throughout the series Sirius is closely linked with death. Mistaken for the Grim when first introduced, Sirius is accused of being a mass murderer and spends twelve years in Azkaban prison paying for crimes he did not commit. His large, shaggy black dog form not only resembles traditional images of the Grim and spectral dogs associated with death but also reaffirms his association with traditional dog symbolism.

Gräslund states, "the role of the dog may, in my view, be regarded as symbolic, the one who is responsible for the transformation to the divine," and Sirius assumes such a symbolic role of sacrificial animal in the series (6). He not only spends twelve years in Azkaban paying for the betrayal and murders committed by Peter Pettigrew but he also gives his life to save Harry. His death is necessary to drive the plot forward and to ensure that Harry understands the gravity of Voldemort's increasing power. Although destined to be "the Chosen One" from the moment Voldemort tried to kill him as a baby, after Sirius' death Harry devotes himself wholeheartedly to vanquishing Voldemort. In this way, Sirius acts as the stimulus for Harry to truly become the Christ-like savior of the wizarding world. By giving his life to save Harry and spurring him to action against Voldemort, Sirius embodies "the connection between dog and sacrifice as well as between dog and death" (Gräslund 7). Classical mythology linked dogs with death, but the literature and society of the Middle Ages emphasized a dog's loyalty above its connection to death.

In the late Middle Ages, the popularity of hunting as a sport rather than a necessity “brought about the gradual welcome of dogs as companion animals in the upper ranks of medieval society” (Podberscheck, Paul, and Serpell 50). Although dogs were originally signs of violence, once common practice required that “all noblemen must be trained to hunt with dogs and to develop a love and mastery of them,” the dog began to take on the popular role of “man’s best friend” (Podberscheck, Paul, and Serpell 53). This new manner of thinking in the late 1300s allowed the dog to become a “symbol of the knightly class” (Podberscheck, Paul, and Serpell 53). Soon, “dogs began to be treated with tenderness, devotion, and one may even say brotherhood” (Podberscheck, Paul, and Serpell 53). As Edward of Norwich’s *The Master of Game*, a medieval hunting manual, states, “a hound is true to his lord and his master.” Clearly, Sirius’ role within the *Harry Potter* series acknowledges these late medieval ideas about dogs and their role as companion animals. Best friend of James and godfather to Harry, Sirius asserts his position as a companion throughout the series. Through these depictions of Sirius, Rowling fuses classical ideas of dogs and death with the medieval idea of dogs as companion animals. She once again allows the fluidity of the human-animal boundary to highlight her main characters’ truest human characteristics.

Like Sirius, the remaining Marauders also highlight their own personalities through their Animagus forms. As Rowling stated in a BBC Worldbook chat interview on March 4, 2004, an Animagus “become[s] the animal that suits [him] best” (Rowling). James, as a stag, embodies many of the Christ-like aspects that make the stag such a suitable form for his son Harry’s Patronus. James, although he never dies and rises again like Harry does, is in fact resurrected, both metaphorically and literally, in many ways by his son. As mentioned repeatedly throughout

the series, Harry looks just like his father James. Harry even mistakes himself for the ghost of his father when saving Sirius from the dementors (*PA* 411-12). Several prominent characters reinforce Harry's resemblance to his father, and Sirius even views Harry as the return of his best friend. Sirius, for one, certainly seems to believe that James is reborn in Harry. Additionally, Harry literally brings a form of his father back from the dead on multiple occasions: through the Mirror of Erised (*SS* 208-09), through *Priori Incantatem* (*GF* 667), and through the Resurrection Stone (*DH* 699). In this way, although James never truly or physically rises from the dead, his Animagus form highlights the fact that his destiny is to father "the Chosen One" (*OP*). Without his recalling James from the dead, Harry would not have had the paternal support he needed to follow the prophecy and accept his inevitable destiny to become the sacrifice for the world. James becomes important through his death and his lineage. He is risen from the dead figuratively, and he gives birth to the "Chosen One" who physically rises from the dead in order to save the wizarding world.

While James is defined by his inner goodness, Peter Pettigrew is characterized by his treachery and deception. He betrays his friends' trust and sells James, Lily, and Harry to Voldemort. His rat Animagus form showcases these qualities and, again, highlights Rowling's connection to classical, medieval, and modern symbolism. Rats have long been associated with sickness and despair. This association spread in Europe during the fourteenth century when the Black Plague's effects peaked in ferocity. Believed to be the carriers of the disease, rats became a symbol of impending illness and death, a "sign of sickness, witches, demons, and goblins" (Becker 245). Ever since, rats have remained a symbol for disease and untruthfulness. Even in today's modern popular culture, rats are associated with liars, an association seen in numerous

films, novels, children's tales, and idioms. Following this progression, Peter Pettigrew appropriately becomes a rat through his Animagus transformation. As the one who betrays James, Lily, and Harry to Voldemort, he performs one of the most traitorous acts in the series. He did indeed lie to his friends and, in turn, brought about their deaths. While James' and Sirius' Animagus forms showcase the positive aspects of their human characters and label them heroes, Peter's Animagus form clearly aligns him with Rowling's villains.

Similarly, Rowling depicts Rita Skeeter as able to transform into a beetle. Hermione explains, "No you see . . . Rita Skeeter . . . is an unregistered Animagus. She can turn . . . into a beetle" (*GF* 727). Insects have featured prominently in ancient and medieval animal imagery and more often than not carry negative associations with them. In his Fable 402, Aesop depicts beetles who only consume garbage:

Once upon a time the bees invited the beetles to dinner. The beetles arrived, and when dinner was served the bees offered the beetles some honey and honeycomb. The beetles barely ate anything and then flew away. Next the beetles invited the bees, and when dinner was served, they offered the bees a plate full of dung. The bees wouldn't eat even a single bite and instead they flew straight back home. (Gibbs 187)

Similarly, in Odo of Cheriton's fable "The Beetle," Odo uses a beetle as a representative of "an impious person, . . . accursed and unnatural" (Jacobs 103). The end of the fable reads:

[The beetle] is someone who (rather than savoring Christ) savors the dung of sin, the places of the Devil. He is someone who (rather than savoring the life and exempla of the saints) savors swallows' droppings. As Augustine writes: "Their taste is corrupt at heart, on account of the burning fever of their iniquity." (103)

Odo's condemnation of the beetle cements the negative depiction of beetles in the Middle Ages. Like Aesop's fable, Odo's fable associates beetles with dung and excrement. He warns that those who live like beetles concern themselves with nothing more than carnal pleasures. While these connections do not imply direct causality in Rowling's use of a beetle to represent Skeeter, they demonstrate the fact that many symbols we believe to be modern do in fact have ties to older ideas (Weisl 15-16).

As a tabloid journalist, Skeeter spends her life searching out the carnal pleasures and gossip of the wizarding world. Like the beetles in Aesop's fables she presents this "dung" as something worthy of display in the newspaper. These associations extend to the modern era not only through Rowling's description of Rita Skeeter, but also through popular modern associations of the press with insects. In the *Harry Potter* series, Hermione acknowledges this connection on the ride home after a year of Rita Skeeter's snooping for stories:

"I found out how she was listening in on private conversations when she wasn't supposed to be coming onto the grounds," said Hermione in a rush . . . . "Bugging," said Hermione happily . . . . "She's been buzzing around for stories all year." (*GF* 727-28).

Skeeter embodies the essence of these negative connotations. Beyond Rowling's pun of the word "bugging," Skeeter's beetle form becomes a symbol for her debasement as a tabloid journalist, and as Weisl argues, "the generated object is an essential part of the remedialization of contemporary culture . . . . both in [its] ability to tie history to the present and in [its] preservation of a medieval sense of objects" (Weisl 15-16). Rowling fuses classical and medieval symbolism with modern colloquial associations to showcase Skeeter's true qualities.

Through these structures and depictions, Rowling's use of Animagus transformations highlights her classical and medieval influences. She again asserts that the human-animal boundary is fluid, as Salisbury argued, by allowing her Animagi to maintain their human personalities and characteristics while in animal form. Assigning her characters Animagi shapes enmeshed in classical and medieval animal symbolism enables Rowling to cement her exploration of the human-animal boundary in age-old imagery and to carry this imagery into the modern age. Once again, Rowling's portrayal of the human-animal boundary delineates her heroes and villains and points to her ability to fuse elements of classical, medieval, and modern animal imagery.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PARSELMOUTHS

J. K. Rowling's exploration of the boundary between humans and animals continues beyond the realms of animal transformations and personal symbols. She also explores the fluidity of the human-animal boundary by allowing select characters to converse with animals. Though an innate ability, wizards must consciously choose to use their power to speak with snakes. In the second novel of the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Rowling reminds readers that Harry can speak to snakes and introduces the fact that Lord Voldemort is one of the few other people known to have this ability. Harry realized his power to converse with serpents before he knew he was a wizard, but he did not understand the full implications of his talent until the wizarding world awakened him to the fact that "being able to talk to snakes was what Salazar Slytherin was famous for" (CS 196). Immediately, Harry's connection to snakes places him in a complicated position. The negative associations attached to Parseltongue and Salazar Slytherin become especially salient when recalling the fact that the Sorting Hat wished to place Harry in Slytherin House upon his first arrival at Hogwarts: "You could be great, you know, it's all here inside your head, and Slytherin would help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that" (SS 133). Harry, knowing Slytherin House's reputation, begs to be placed anywhere else, and the Hat agrees to his wishes.

Despite the fact that Harry convinced the Sorting Hat to place him in Gryffindor House instead of Slytherin House, Harry still maintains his connection to Salazar Slytherin through his ability to speak Parseltongue. By extension, Harry's ability reinforces his connection to Lord Voldemort, fellow Parselmouth and past member of Slytherin House. In fact, Harry and Lord Voldemort share several other "strange likenesses"; as sixteen-year-old Tom Riddle (Voldemort)

explains, he and Harry are “both half-bloods, orphans, raised by Muggles. Probably the only two Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts . . . we even look something alike” (CS 317). Because of these similarities, Harry wonders if his destiny will mirror Lord Voldemort’s.

As Parselmouths, both Harry and Lord Voldemort have crossed the line between human and animal. They are able to maintain their human forms while conversing with members of the animal kingdom. As the wizarding world’s reaction to Parselmouths suggests, this gift is uncommon and suspicious. Parselmouths represent a breach in the definition of what is human and arouse suspicion and distrust in the members of the wizarding world. Parselmouths are feared and oppressed. Harry’s classmates, teachers, and best friends see him in a new and fearful light after he reveals his ability to speak with snakes. In this way, Harry, although he was previously honored and adored by his peers, faces ridicule and scorn. His connection to an inherent animal nature thrusts him from the top tier of societal standing and places him at the bottom and on the outskirts. He, like Lord Voldemort, becomes “other.” No longer welcomed by the mainstream society of Hogwarts School, Harry represents a constructed “other” that exists beyond the realms of normative societal power, and others view him as dangerous and even evil.

Seen “as a symbol of evil,” the view of the snake “in the Christian tradition” arose in part from the representation of a serpent as evil tempter in the Garden of Eden (Carr-Gomm 79, Genesis 3). The story of the life of Saint Patrick, who rid Ireland of snakes in the fifth century, suggests that the traditional view of snakes having a connection to evil lasted throughout the Middle Ages when people grew increasingly comfortable seeing animals as human exemplars; however, many church officials still maintained the idea of complete separation between humans and animals. Rowling’s representation of a wizard’s connection to snakes carries this same idea

through to modern times. Udo Becker explains in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, the “serpent . . . symbolizes death or ruinous powers,” and as “architectural sculpture and book art of the Middle Ages” show, the snake, or asp, “a type of serpent,” has long been considered a “symbol of evil and callousness” (25, 41). Considering this long-standing view of snakes allows readers to better understand the negative reaction that wizards have to Parselmouths. Snakes represent all that humans fear: death, evil, and ruin.

Supporting the view of snakes as evil, all of the students at Hogwarts begin to suspect and fear Harry as soon as his ability to speak Parseltongue is revealed. They understand such an ability to be “the mark of a Dark Wizard” (CS 199). Their reaction to Parselmouths (similar to the wizarding world’s reaction to werewolves) underscores the idea that the human-animal boundary is fluid and often blurred by humans who, in various forms, explore animal nature.

By building upon this view of snakes, Rowling upholds the suggestion that the human-animal boundary is blurred and that many people exist in a borderland between the two, but she also uses the Parseltongue link between Harry and Lord Voldemort to show that humans can overcome a connection to and a descent into animal nature. Classical mythology is full of human-animal transformations, and in the Middle Ages, people began to believe that human actions could connect them more fully with animals. Over time literature began to include a greater number of hybrid animals and more instances of humans transforming into animals (Salisbury 130). By choosing evil acts, people dehumanized themselves and became more animalistic. Salisbury explains, “Thus by the late Middle Ages, it seems that one’s claim to humanity could be more and more easily lost” (146). She argues that humans’ choice to align with the evil side of human nature dehumanized them and caused them to “slip over the line

from human to beast” (146). As the appearance of more hybrid and borderland creatures (werewolves in *Bisclavret* and *William of Palerne*) suggests, “people were reconsidering the early medieval categories of human and animal” (Salisbury 149). People began to understand the human-animal boundary in terms of human choice and behavior. As Aquinas and several early church fathers argued, humans are separated from animals by rational thought, or in other words by the ability to make choices using more than simple animals instinct. Salisbury explains this temporal shift:

Monsters had captured the medieval imagination by the late twelfth century.

Descriptions of monsters offer insights into late medieval definitions of humanity and bestiality. As we have seen, the separation between the two could no longer be taken for granted. As categories blurred, people began to use behavior as the criterion that defined bestiality (or, of course, humanity). (150)

Rowling’s characterization of Harry and Voldemort and their responses to their shared ability to speak Parseltongue form around this same paradigm: human choices allow humans to either lose or strengthen their humanity.

Lord Voldemort prized his ability to speak to snakes as a sign of his connection to the great Salazar Slytherin and used it to gain control over those around him. Voldemort exploited this gift for its worst qualities, a connection to evil and the chance to form a band of followers, but Harry separates himself from his ability to speak Parseltongue as well as his connections to both Salazar Slytherin and Lord Voldemort. Questioning himself after nearly the entirety of Hogwarts School believes him to be the Heir of Slytherin, Harry returns to the Sorting Hat only to find that it maintains his connection to Slytherin House: ““You’ve been wondering whether I

put you in the right House . . . I stand by what I said before . . . you *would* have done well in Slytherin” (CS 206). Harry, unable to accept a connection to Slytherin and to Voldemort, insists that the Hat is wrong about him (CS 206). He denies that he is in any way like Salazar Slytherin, the man who “started all this pure-blood stuff,” or Lord Voldemort, the man who embraced the Dark Arts and murdered Harry’s parents (CS 152).

By accepting and cherishing his ability to speak to snakes, a breach in the boundary between humans and animals, Voldemort begins his journey down a dark and dangerous path that culminates in his becoming the greatest Dark Wizard throughout history. His connection to the animal world sets him apart as an anomaly, connects him to what is unnatural, and enables him to use his magic for evil. Voldemort delights in the rarity of his ability to speak Parseltongue and is inherently separated from the rest of the wizarding world. He sees this separation as an asset and uses it to set himself beyond and above those around him. He believes himself peerless and, seeing himself as more powerful than all others, surrounds himself with devoted, fearful followers and a snake rather than human friends. Not only does Voldemort converse with and befriend Nagini, but he also uses this power to sustain his existence after being nearly destroyed by Harry as a baby: “I possessed snakes to survive” (GF 654).

Voldemort’s unnatural connection to animal nature also manifests itself through his physical appearance. The more Voldemort uses his powers for evil, the more he grows to resemble a snake. On the night that he is reborn in the graveyard, he rises from the cauldron with a “snakelike face” (GF 643). This depiction of Voldemort as a hybridization of human and animal reinforces the fact that he is not a normal, mortal man. He “has gone farther down the path of immortality than any other man” and has embraced animal nature so thoroughly that even his

physical human form is lost (*GF* 653). As Hope B. Werness explains snakes were “symbol[s] for death, the devil, the Antichrist, or sin and is often depicted at the feet of Christ” (35). As such, Voldemort uses his connection to snakes to enable his evil deeds. As the only heir of Slytherin and a Parselmouth, Voldemort controls the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets and terrorizes the students and faculty of Hogwarts. Voldemort’s actions lead him down an evil path and play out the idea that humans who choose evil descend physically into animal nature. He has chosen to let the animal within him direct his actions and, therefore, makes himself a villain.

Harry, on the other hand, shuns his ability to speak to snakes and shies away from a breach of the border between human and animal. He detests his connection to Slytherin and Voldemort and defines himself against a descent into the animal world: “‘I don’t think I’m like [Voldemort]!’ said Harry, more loudly than he’d intended” (*CS* 332). Despite the numerous connections between himself and Voldemort, Harry refuses to accept that he will follow the same path. He uses his ability to speak Parseltongue for good: to protect fellow student Justin Finch-Fletchley at the Dueling Club, to save Ron Weasley’s sister, Ginny, from the Chamber of Secrets, and to destroy one of Lord Voldemort’s Horcruxes which enables him to eventually destroy Lord Voldemort himself (*CS, DH*). Harry cannot escape his connections to evil, but he defines himself against them through his choices.

Much like Professor Lupin’s ability to suppress his werewolf nature, Harry escapes his association with evil (Parseltongue, Salazar Slytherin, and Lord Voldemort) through his actions, a reassertion of his humanity. Rather than using his powers for evil (as a snake symbolizes), Harry separates himself from evil. Rowling underscores the importance and relevance of this choice through an affirmation that Harry, despite his connections to evil and the horrors in his

past, can choose his own path. After Harry defeats the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets and meets the teenage Voldemort, Dumbledore attempts to quell his fears by explaining, “It is our choices, Harry, that show us who we truly are, far more than our abilities” (CS 333). Harry overcomes Voldemort by choice. When Harry willingly walks to his death in the Forbidden Forest, he takes his mortality into his own hands and accepts the fact that he must sacrifice himself in order to destroy Voldemort. Through this choice Harry defeats Voldemort and saves the wizarding world. Voldemort could not willingly accept death, and Harry’s ability to do so allows him not only to escape death but also to overcome it.

As previously stated, the snake (Voldemort) and the stag (Harry) have often been depicted in mortal opposition: “snakes . . . often appear opposed to other creatures including . . . the stag” (Werness 377). As Harry’s and Voldemort’s relationship indicates, Rowling’s plot builds upon this idea. Ever since the prophecy caused Voldemort to attack Harry as a baby, he and Harry have been in direct mortal opposition to one another: Voldemort, the evil villain; Harry, the chosen one. Harry’s resurrection from the dead reinforces his position as Christ-like savior and the imagery of the stag as an embodiment of his character in that the stag defeats the snake. In other words, Harry’s inherent virtue defeats Voldemort’s inherent evil. Harry’s choice to pursue a destiny different than Lord Voldemort’s enables his victory over him. Again, Rowling highlights Harry’s Christ-like role. His willingness to accept death in the Forbidden Forest to save humanity destroys the Horcrux within him. This eradication of the evil that clings to his soul mirrors Christ’s destruction of sin through a literal death and rebirth in the Bible. Just as Christ willingly accepts death as the inevitable plan for humanity’s salvation, Harry also willingly offers himself as a sacrifice for the entire wizarding world. Through these connections

and allusions, Rowling embraces ancient and medieval animal symbolism and highlights Harry's heroism and unselfish nature.

Through the contrasting destinies of Harry and Lord Voldemort, Rowling sets up the dichotomy of good and evil: while the boundary between humans and animals remains fluid, rational human choice enables people to overcome the animals within themselves. Unlike Voldemort who embraces the negative side of the animal within him, Harry separates from his connection to snakes. He casts a Patronus, yet this Patronus does not cause him to physically cross the boundary between what is human and what is animal. His Patronus becomes an animal guardian and guide rather than a harbinger of evil. This connection is built on and enabled by human emotion and a choice to defeat evil. Harry must conjure positive human memories to create his Patronus, but Voldemort embraces Parseltongue which is built on a physical crossing of the human-animal boundary. He embraces the animal. Just as Lupin learns to tame his werewolf nature, Harry separates from the wildness of animal nature.

In fact, Harry's ability to speak Parseltongue arises from the fact that he is the host to one of Voldemort's Horcruxes. The piece of Voldemort that resides within Harry carries the ability to speak Parseltongue; therefore, Harry speaks Parseltongue. Once Harry has destroyed this piece of Voldemort within him, he no longer speaks or understands Parseltongue. J. K. Rowling, in a Bloomsbury chat interview, acknowledged the fact that Harry "loses the ability [to speak Parseltongue]" after he destroys Voldemort and that Harry "is very glad to do so" (30 July 2007). Through this statement, Rowling asserts that Harry's ability to speak Parseltongue is not inherent in his nature. It is added by Voldemort when he tries to kill infant Harry. In this way, Rowling

underscores the fact that Harry always tried to remove himself from this ability. He knew that his nature was not evil and that the ability to speak Parseltongue was a connection to such forces.

Through these relationships and depictions, Rowling again uses animal symbolism rooted in classical and medieval imagery, as well as a long-standing paradigm that saw the ability for humans to descend into bestial states, to delineate her heroes and villains. Both Voldemort and Harry speak Parseltongue, but while Voldemort uses this ability to build an evil empire, Harry uses the same ability for good.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In her series of seven novels, Rowling constructs a society and a framework of characterization that allows her to explore the human-animal boundary in a variety of ways. She connects her novels to the ideology of the classical and medieval periods while still acknowledging the ways that the relationship between humans and animals has changed over the years. Through her descriptions of werewolves, Patronuses, Animagi, and Harry Potter's and Lord Voldemort's abilities to speak Parseltongue, Rowling uses classical, medieval, and modern animal symbolism to showcase her characters' personalities. These human-animal frameworks associate particular imagery with each character, and this imagery highlights the core of the character.

Rowling's fusion of classical, medieval, and contemporary animal symbolism shows in her description of both Fenrir Greyback and Remus Lupin. Rowling creates a distinction between these two werewolves by focusing her description of Greyback on his physical characteristics and his savagery. In these ways, Greyback reminds readers of medieval wolves who were also described based on their grotesque and fearsome physical characteristics. Rowling highlights the wolf's traditional association with savagery and creates a paradigm that once again aligns a werewolf with the instability and fear accrued by one's losing touch with his humanity. Greyback specifically creates opportunities to feed his bloodlust and delights in the moments when others notice his ferocity. Greyback completely assumes the role of "clichéd killer wolf" and is shunned by both Death Eater and mainstream human society (Pluskowski, *Wolves* 120). His fearsome nature stands in stark contrast to Lupin's more gentle nature. Professor Remus Lupin controls his lycanthropy through use of the Wolfsbane potion and

through his own sense of duty to those around him. He maintains his human qualities while transformed and minimizes the threat he poses to others. Lupin knows that he may injure one of the students at Hogwarts and, therefore, he resigns from his teaching post. Through these contrasting personalities, Rowling shows the different ways that werewolves have been portrayed since the classical and medieval periods and the ways that modern popular culture, including werewolf films, have influenced Rowling's characterization of both Greyback and Lupin. Rowling uses Greyback and Lupin's status as werewolves to showcase their deepest human characteristics; Greyback is a villain while Lupin is a hero.

Rowling also separates her heroes and villains through their Patronuses. Rowling's villains exist on the same side as the dementors and, therefore, have little reason to create a Patronus to ward off such forces; however, Professor Umbridge's Patronus enables her to perform the evil tasks of the Ministry of Magic. Her Patronus takes the form of a cat, an animal that has long been associated with witchcraft and magic. In this way, Rowling aligns Umbridge with the Ministry of Magic and highlights the corruptness of both the Ministry and her own character. In a similar fashion, Rowling showcases the goodness of her heroes through their Patronuses. Harry's Patronus is a stag and demonstrates his position as Christ-like savior of the wizarding world. Stags have often been symbols of Christ and have been shown in opposition to snakes. Harry, who stands in opposition to Voldemort, saves the wizarding world through the willing sacrifice of his own life. His stag Patronus embodies his altruism and his inevitable destiny. Professor Snape's Patronus also illuminates his destiny. His doe Patronus not only signifies his love for Lily Potter but also his position as one of Harry's protectors and teachers. Snape loved Lily Potter and promised his life to save her; however, her death led him to follow

an alternative path: protecting and aiding her son Harry. Does have long been associated with motherhood and alternative paths to a goal. Snape, who joined Voldemort's Death Eaters as a young man, ends his life as a member of the Order of the Phoenix working to destroy Voldemort. He loves Lily but must spend his life protecting her only son. Additionally, Snape enables Harry to continue his journey to destroy Voldemort by providing him with the Sword of Gryffindor. Through these events, Snape follows an alternative path for his own life, and Rowling reinforces his position as a hero while demonstrating his inherent positive core.

Rowling uses literal human-animal transformations to showcase additional characters' dominant personality traits. The Animagi transformation allows a witch or wizard to transform at will into an animal, and Rowling ensures that these witches and wizards transform into the animals that suit their personalities best. Professor McGonagall, praised for her skill as witch, transforms into a cat. As previously discussed, cats have a long association with witchcraft. In this way, Rowling showcases McGonagall's skill. Additionally, Rowling enables McGonagall to maintain her human characteristics while in animal form. Similarly, Sirius Black's and Rita Skeeter's Animagi forms exhibit their personalities and dominant characteristics. Sirius Black, who transforms into a large black dog, serves as an example of a strong and loyal companion while also dying in an effort to protect Harry. Sirius, James Potter's best friend and Harry's godfather, dies in the Ministry of Magic after Harry finds himself trapped there by Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Sirius' death fills Harry with a strong desire to destroy Voldemort and spurs him on to his inevitable destiny. In ancient times, dogs were associated with death and were often depicted as the harbingers of death. Sirius fills this role in the *Harry Potter* series by being a friend to Harry and by dying. Just as Sirius's character brings ancient animal symbolism

to the modern era, Rita Skeeter's transformation into a beetle also connects Rowling's work to ancient, medieval, and contemporary animal symbolism. As evidenced by Aesop's and Odo of Cheriton's fables, beetles have been portrayed in a negative light for centuries. Skeeter embodies these negative characteristics in her work as a tabloid journalist. Through Skeeter's Animagi form, Rowling also incorporates modern slang connotations of bugs and insects. In these ways, Rowling fuses ancient, medieval, and modern animal symbolism in her depiction of Animagi. She uses this symbolism to showcase her Animagi characters' true personalities.

Rowling also showcases Harry's and Voldemort's personalities through their ability to speak Parseltongue. Voldemort, the only heir of Salazar Slytherin, prizes his ancestry and exploits his ability to commune with snakes to advance his own evil agenda. Snakes have a long history of association with evil, and Voldemort, who becomes physically snakelike in appearance, represents evil incarnate. In contrast, Harry dislikes his ability to speak Parseltongue. He distances himself from a connection to Slytherin House by choosing a different path for himself. He refuses to believe that his core is evil and uses his ability to speak Parseltongue to save his classmates and to defeat Voldemort. Rowling again uses her depiction of the human-animal boundary as well as ancient, medieval, and modern animal symbolism to showcase her characters' deepest human qualities and to delineate her heroes and villains. Through these depictions, Rowling fuses ancient, medieval, and modern animal symbolism to showcase her characters' truest human characteristics and to display the fluidity of the human-animal boundary.

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