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Archetypes and Stereotypes in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series

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**Title:** Archetypes and Stereotypes in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the archetypal hero and gender stereotypes in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Using both theories about the hero genre and the discussion of the *Harry Potter* novels themselves, I argue that despite following the literary structure of the archetypal hero, and sharing many of the composite hero's traits, Harry Potter breaks the stereotype and challenges the traditional hero narrative. I will also argue that *Harry Potter* goes against many of the gender stereotypes that often occur in literature. This essay will mainly focus on Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, but side characters as well to some extent.

**Keywords:** Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, heroism, hero, archetypal criticism, archetypal hero, Hermione Granger, gender roles, stereotypes, femininities, masculinities.

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## 1. Introduction

In this essay I will explore the archetypal hero narrative and gender stereotypes in the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. Just as Professor McGonagall prophesized in the first novel, when talking about Harry Potter - “every child in our world will know his name!”- the series about the young wizard has become immensely popular among children. The seven novels have been read by millions of children and adults since the first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, was first published in 1997. There is not one single correct answer to what it is about the series that interests so many people of different ages, gender and ethnic backgrounds, though many have tried to find it. Perhaps, Harry’s heroic journey is one that resonates so deeply within us all since it follows a structure that can be found in thousands of myths, stories and legends throughout the centuries. The journey of the archetypal hero is very much ingrained in us from our childhood when we heard fairy tales that follow the same structure as *Harry Potter*.

The series follows the orphaned boy, Harry Potter, as he finds out that he is a wizard and is invited to join Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. There he learns that it is his destiny to defeat the evil wizard Lord Voldemort who killed Harry’s parents and terrorized the Wizarding world for years. The reader follows Harry on his heroic journey through the many challenges and trials that he faces with his best friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) discusses the similarities that so many heroes share despite having different settings, themes, characters and plots. The archetypal hero can be found in so many stories that it seems unlikely that it is a coincidence; there is something in the hero’s journey that appeals to us all. Campbell summarizes the journey in its simplest form:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (30)

*Harry Potter* follows this structure, but can a work that is loved by millions of people be reduced to such a simple formula? I will explore this phenomenon in this essay. My thesis statement is that despite following the literary structure of the archetypal hero, and sharing many of the composite hero’s traits, Harry Potter does in fact break the stereotype and

challenges the traditional hero narrative. In the first chapter I will look at the ways in which the *Harry Potter* series support the archetypes and stereotypes, in terms of heroism, as well as gender. I will also look at the different features that the classic hero and Harry Potter as a character share. In order to look at gender stereotypes I will also focus on one of the main female characters, Hermione Granger, as I believe it will offer a good point of reference when looking at Harry Potter and his masculine and feminine qualities.

The second chapter will focus on how *Harry Potter* departs from the archetypes and the gender stereotypes. The archetypal hero is always male, and more often than not Caucasian. This applies to Harry Potter as well, but I will look deeper at what separates Harry Potter from other hero archetypes. In *Deconstructing the Hero* Margery Hourihan talks about the archetypal hero, but unlike Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye (1912-1991) she is more critical towards the composite hero as well as the archetypal heroic features that exist in many stories. She mentions that the hero is usually a young white male with qualities of a leader – brave, strong and beautiful. The hero sets out to rescue the damsel in distress and returns home victorious. What Campbell and Frye seem to skip over in their own books is the prejudice and sexism in the archetypal story. I believe, like Hourihan, that the archetypal hero myth is sexist and favours the white male. This old-fashioned narrative reflects the values of the time period in which it was conceived; it was a time where women were not held in high regard. *Harry Potter*, however, is a more modern story and I will explore if the modernity is reflected in the way Harry Potter and the women are portrayed.

I have chosen a hermeneutical approach as a method, meaning that I will look at and analyse passages in the series and then re-evaluate the text as a whole. However, first I had to choose shorter passages in the seven novels to focus on, rather than looking at the entirety of the series. The passages I ultimately chose were based on a few criteria: they had to have some importance to this essay, i.e. passages that are centred on Harry's heroic features, and when he deviates from the archetypal hero narrative. The second criterion was that it had to have been related to differences between gender, i.e. when the female characters and the male characters were treated differently or unfairly in similar situations. And so I have chosen a few short passages in the *Harry Potter* series that focus on the differences between female and male characters, as well as when the characters abide by certain stereotypes.

## 1.1 Previous research

I have chosen to use previous research that deals with the archetypal hero, as well as gender stereotypes. I selected these sources based on the fact that they either deal with *Harry Potter*, gender or archetypes. I will use archetypal criticism when looking at the *Harry Potter* series, and in order to get a better grasp of it I will use C.G. Jung's and Northrop Frye's ideas concerning archetypes. Archetypal criticism looks at images, symbols and themes that recur in literature. These patterns are archetypes, and exist in many unrelated works of fiction. Since the stories are unconnected it is rather baffling how similar the structure is despite having different plots, settings and characters. Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) is considered one of the forefathers of archetypal criticism. His theory is based on the *personal unconscious* and the *collective unconscious*. The personal unconscious contains knowledge gained from personal experiences, and the collective unconscious refers to the latent thoughts that are shared by all mankind from birth. In his essay "The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious" [Om det kollektivt omedvetnas arketyper] Jung writes that,

[Det kollektivt omedvetna] har innehåll och förhållningssätt som mer eller mindre är desamma överallt, och inom alla individer. Det är, med andra ord, identiskt med sig självt inom alla människor. (102)

[[The collective unconscious] has contents and approaches that are more or less the same everywhere, and within all individuals. It is, in other words, identical with itself within all men]<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to say that the contents from the collective unconscious are what we refer to as archetypes. Jung sees the archetypes from our collective unconscious, and the archetypes found in myth and fairy tales as separate ideas. The archetypes in literature have been passed down from generation to generation, while the knowledge from our collective unconscious is inborn.

Northrop Frye, however, focuses more on the archetypes' function in literature, rather than their origin and what psychological explanation there might be. He says that "[t]he axioms and postulates of criticism, however, have to grow out of the art it deals with" and that "[t]he first thing the literary critic has to do is to read literature", rather than looking at the frameworks outside of literature, as Jungian approaches prescribes (6). The archetypal hero, the mother, the damsel in distress, the warrior etc. are all universal figures that can be found

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<sup>1</sup> My translation from Swedish to English.

in every culture and in their literature. Frye believes that these archetypes solely come from literature and not from our collective unconscious.

Harry Potter has been a part of many people's lives for the past 16 years, and even though the series is relatively new compared to many other classics, there has been a lot of research done on the series. In "Harry Potter and the Secrets of Children's Literature" Maria Nikolajeva discusses the fact that many characters in children's literature are one-dimensional and rather boring; in *Harry Potter*, however, there is an intricacy and complexity that makes Harry Potter a very exciting figure, with a mix of "the heroic and the everyday" (225). I agree with Nikolajeva; despite the fact that the *Harry Potter* series was intended for a younger audience Rowling never talked down to her readers by making Harry and his friends into simple and flat characters. Nikolajeva also mentions that Rowling disregarded many stereotypes when writing her characters and gave them depth; e.g. Hermione is smart and brave, something that is usually assigned to the male hero, and Harry is not adverse to showing emotions of sympathy and compassion, as well as vulnerability, which is seen as typically feminine (231). Nikolajeva goes on to say that Harry Potter deviates from the archetypal hero narrative since he is the product of the modern age, and that he does so by "demonstrating ambiguity in the concepts of good and evil, gender transgressions, and other tokens of the postmodern aesthetics" (226). In other words, Nikolajeva argues that because Harry Potter is not wholly good or wholly evil, he does not fit into the archetypal frame of the hero or the villain, at least according to Frye's interpretation of the archetypal hero.

Nikolajeva also touches on the subject of inequality in the *Harry Potter* novels, both in terms of race and gender. In mentioning "gender transgressions" she acknowledges that *Harry Potter* in some ways strays from gender stereotypes. Nikolajeva asserts that Harry Potter is the classic hero, despite having some traits that deviate from the classic narrative. I largely agree with this; however, I believe that the traits that break the archetype are too many and too important to ignore and therefore the *Harry Potter* books break the stereotype more often than they conform to it.

I will also use an essay by Elizabeth E. Heilman and Trevor Donaldson, "From Sexist to (sort-of) Feminist: Representations of Gender in the Harry Potter Series", when looking at Hermione Granger and gender stereotypes. They claim that the series both questions "societal norms" and conforms to stereotypes (141). Although they criticise Rowling for the lack of substantial female characters, they admit that as the series evolves so does the female presence in the novels. The female characters grow in number, and their importance increases

as well. However, they believe that the female characters, especially Hermione, are merely assistants to the hero. I will look at characters, such as Hermione, and examine if they are nothing more than an aide to the “real” hero of the story.

In her essay “Archetypes and the Unconscious in *Harry Potter* and Diana Wynne Jones’ *Fire and Hemlock* and *Dogsbody*” Alice Mills looks at *Harry Potter* from a Jungian perspective. She believes that the characters in the novels are not only driven by their own personal experiences, but “also by deeper and more universal forces of the collective unconscious” (6). I mentioned earlier that the collective unconscious is, at least from a Jungian perspective, an integral part of archetypal criticism. She also discusses Harry in relation to Voldemort, and I will explore Mills view on their relationship in the next chapter.



## 2. The Archetypal Hero and Gender Stereotypes

In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which *Harry Potter* conforms to archetypes and stereotypes. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, an archetype is an "original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies", and a stereotype is defined as "a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment". Archetypes are the foundation for the characters from which individuality grows; characters that have been reduced to a simplified and predictable version are stereotypes, and they are seen in a negative manner. Two characters can be built on the same archetype (e.g. the hero) but be completely different from each other (e.g. Harry Potter and Frodo in *Lord of the Rings*), while two characters that are classified as the same stereotype are usually portrayed in the same manner (e.g. the dumb blonde, or the damsel in distress).

I will apply archetypal criticism to this essay and my main source of reference will be Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, with focus on "Third Essay: Archetypal Criticism". Archetypal criticism looks for recurring patterns, images and symbols in literature. These archetypes can be repeated characters, plots, settings or themes throughout centuries of literature. As previously stated Jung believes that archetypes come from the *collective unconscious*, a shared set of psychic instincts that are with us from birth. Frye, however, disagrees with Jung and suggests instead that the archetypes can be found in literature and only then become part of our lives, and not something we all just know instinctively. According to Frye archetypes are closely tied to myths, and so in order to study archetypes you must do so in the world of myth. Alan Watts explains the term *myth* in his *Myth and Ritual in Christianity*:

Myth is to be defined as a complex of stories - some no doubt fact, and some fantasy - which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life. (7)

In *Harry Potter* the archetypes are easily identifiable when judged after certain criteria stated in both Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. According to Frye there are three forms of myth in literature. The first one, undisplaced myth, is represented by two contrasting worlds, often heaven and hell, and it contains gods and demons. The second one which, I believe, corresponds best with *Harry Potter* is romantic and usually places "implicit mythical patterns" (139) in a world ruled by human experience; this myth also idealizes the content in order to contrast realism. The third form, realism,

emphasizes content and not structure. Frye also divides the myths into genres: the romantic, the tragic, the comic and the iron or satiric (162) and I will be discussing *Harry Potter* in the context of the myth of romance.

Frye states that the closer romance is to myth the main antagonist, the villain if you will, “will take on demonic mythical qualities” (187). In *Harry Potter*, Voldemort transforms into a man with a snake-like face as his powers grow, which would put *Harry Potter* somewhere in between romance and undisplaced myth. Nikolajeva claims that the circumstances surrounding Harry’s childhood makes him a perfect archetypal hero, but not a “genuine mythic hero” (226).

The Harry Potter figure has all the necessary components of the romantic hero. There are mystical circumstances around his birth, he is dislocated and oppressed and suddenly given unlimited power. His innocence and intrinsic benevolence make him superior to the evil – adult – forces. He bears the mark of the chosen on his forehead, and he is worshiped in the wizard community as the future savior. (Nikolajeva 226)

Nikolajeva goes on to say that “[t]he pattern is easily recognizable from world mythologies, even though Harry is not claimed to be a god or a son of a god, which, in Frye’s typology, disqualifies him as a genuine mythic hero, displacing him to the level of romance” (226). Frye states that “in the myth proper he is divine, in romance proper he is human” (188).

In his essay, Frye states that in romance “everything is focussed on a conflict between the hero and his enemy” (187) and thus the hero and the villain are characterized by opposite traits. The hero has positive traits, such as “spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth” and the villain is surrounded by all these stereotypically negative features – “winter, darkness confusion, sterility, moribund life” (187-188). The hero is supposed to be a pure being – strong, kind, courageous, beautiful and always victorious. It is true, as Nikolajeva states, that Harry has many of the traits that would make him an archetypal hero. Not only the circumstances of Harry’s childhood, but also how he eventually develops into a dominant leader. Rowling’s structure of the series can very clearly be seen as a parallel to the archetypal hero’s journey. The first step of the journey, according to Campbell, begins with the call to adventure, which in *Harry Potter* begins when he is invited to attend Hogwarts. The seven novels then represent the trial and challenges Harry must overcome in order to be victorious – his real quest is to defeat Voldemort and in doing so he saves everyone, both the Wizarding world and the Muggle world. Harry is also, like the hero, physically and mentally strong; his friends look to him when they need a leader. In *Order of the Phoenix* Hermione comes up with the idea that someone should teach the students Defense against the Dark Arts, because

their teacher refuses to do it, but instead of taking on the role herself, Hermione encourages Harry to do it. He excels in the position as a leader. Meanwhile Hermione takes a more submissive role, despite being one of the smartest witches their age. Rowling gives Hermione immense knowledge of magic, but when it comes to the more violent subjects she lets Harry be the more prominent one, while Hermione masters the more intellectual subjects.

This essay, as stated in my thesis, also explores the different gender stereotypes that exist in literature. Hermione's submission to Harry shows that despite being praised for creating strong female characters, Rowling does sometimes fall into the trap of stereotyping both the female and male characters. Hermione sometimes breaks the stereotype since she has been assigned wisdom and knowledge, rather than physical beauty. Hermione is a strong female character, but as Heilman and Donaldson point out in their essay "From Sexist to (sort-of) Feminist" she is often secondary to the hero and his quest, and uses her extensive knowledge to aid him but not herself (145). Hermione is described as an enabler and an assistant in their essay. Campbell also mentions the archetypal female helper in relations to the male hero. But he assigns more importance to her than Heilman and Donaldson do. She becomes the protector, as well.

It is in this ordeal that the hero may derive hope and assurance from the helpful female figure, by whose magic [...] he is protected through all the frightening experiences. (Campbell 130-31)

Campbell's "helpful female figure" can be found in Hermione and Ginny Weasley, the hero's love interest, as they both become someone on whom Harry relies. Harry's mother is also the one who protected Harry from Voldemort throughout the series, despite not being there physically. Dumbledore explains that it is her love that protects him like a shield. They become his support in the series, which can be interpreted as though Hermione, Ginny and Harry's mother are heroines and archetypes in their own right, but they can also be seen as merely tools there to aid him in his quest, as Heilman and Donaldson suggest, and it is then they become inferior to the male characters.

Ron Weasley, the third part of the trio, is also seen as a side-kick to Harry; however, he is more equal to Harry than Hermione is. Harry and Ron often choose to stay on the same side in an argument, while Hermione is placed on the opposite side. There is an interesting dynamic to Harry's and Ron's friendship. They represent the classic *hero - sidekick* structure which works well when Harry goes through the trials of the archetypal hero, but when it comes to their friendship this imbalance works against them. Harry receives the attention that Ron, as the second youngest of seven siblings, yearns for. The fact that Harry does not want the

attention seems to anger Ron further, because Ron cannot understand why Harry would not want to receive praise and fame, as seen several times in the novels.

‘Oh, Harry, isn’t it obvious?’ Hermione said despairingly. ‘He’s jealous!’  
‘Jealous?’ Harry said incredulously. ‘Jealous of what? He wants to make a prat of himself in front of the whole school, does he?’  
‘Look,’ said Hermione patiently, ‘it’s always you who gets all the attention, you know it is. I know it’s not your fault,’ she added quickly, seeing Harry open his mouth furiously, ‘I know you don’t ask for it... but- well- you know, Ron’s got all those brothers to compete against at home, and you’re his best friend, and you’re really famous – he’s always shunted to one side whenever people see you, and he puts up with it, and he never mentions it, but I suppose this is just one time too many...’ (*Goblet of Fire* 254)

It also becomes Hermione’s job to explain to Harry why Ron is mad at him. As if Harry, being a male, is not in tune with his feelings, and Hermione as a female is. According to Professor John Stephens, in his essay “Gender, Genre and Children’s Literature”, stereotypical females are more emotional than males, as well as obedient (18-19). Hermione stands up for herself and tells Harry to talk to Ron himself, but a moment later she goes from angry to emotional; the narrator tells us that “[s]he looked extremely anxious” (255) when Harry jokes about death. Rowling uses words like “despairingly”, “patiently”, and “anxious” when describing Hermione in this situation, while Harry becomes “incredulous” and “furious”, enforcing the gender stereotype that females are emotional and males are aggressive. Even when Hermione is praised for “the use of cool logic in the face of fire” by the headmaster Hermione reacts by hiding her face in her arms, and “Harry strongly suspected she burst into tears”; she reacts emotionally once again (*Philosopher’s Stone* 221).

Hermione’s value in the novels is determined by what Harry and Ron think of her. In multiple situations it is Hermione’s wits and knowledge that save the trio from a dangerous situation, but many times she is not recognized for it. She is admired when it benefits the boys, but teased when she is the more dominant one in the classroom. However, Hermione is also quick to discredit herself in favour of Harry, who above all is portrayed as brave and can easily make friends, which, according to our female hero is much more important than “books! And cleverness!” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 208). Hermione is viewed as boring when she prefers to focus on her studying or reading. Harry often takes a more submissive role (instead of being dominant and a leader like the archetypal hero narrative suggests) when it comes to the more academic situations, but is not mocked for being too weak. Other female characters are seen as stupid, even by Hermione, when they prefer Divination class over a more intellectual course, as Heilman and Donaldson point out in their essay (146).

Hermione's opinions are quickly discredited in favour of the male characters' ideas. For example, in the sixth novel Harry finds a course book full of hand-written notes which help him excel in his Potions class. Hermione is very suspicious towards the book, since they do not know who owned it previously. A book like that has only meant trouble for them in the past when Harry got hold of a diary that once belonged to Voldemort. Hermione applies logic to the situation, but when she expresses her concerns she is accused of being jealous of Harry's academic success. Similarly, when Harry receives a new broom from someone anonymous he and Ron are in awe of it, while Hermione is the one who has to play devil's advocate and tells their teacher since she suspects that it is from Sirius Black, someone who was believed to want to hurt Harry at the time. This causes the boys to stop talking to her, even though in the end it is revealed that she is right.

‘What did you go running to McGonagall for?’

Hermione threw her book aside. She was still pink in the face, but stood up and faced Ron defiantly.

‘Because I thought -- and Professor McGonagall agrees with me -- that that broom was probably sent to Harry by Sirius Black!’ (172)

[...]

Harry knew that Hermione had meant well, but that didn't stop him from being angry with her.

[...]

Ron was furious with Hermione too. (173)

[...]

‘Okay, side with Ron, I knew you would!’ she said shrilly. (187)

[...]

[Sirius:] ‘There is something I never got around to telling you during our brief meeting. It was I who sent you the Firebolt –’

‘Ha!’ said Hermione triumphantly. ‘See! I told you it was from him!’

‘Yes, but he hadn't jinxed it, had he?’ said Ron. (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 315)

Even when faced with the facts Ron refuses to admit that Hermione was right. In this instance Rowling does not allow Hermione to be completely correct, since it turns out that Sirius indeed was on their side and never meant any harm. Ron does not know for certain that the broom was not dangerous, while Hermione used logic to deduce that it was likely a gift from Sirius. By giving Ron the last word and letting him be correct, Rowling demotes Hermione's use of logic into mere guesswork or dumb luck. Ron becomes “furious” while Hermione's tone is described as “shrilly” – which is often seen as much more negative. By turning both Ron and our hero, Harry, against Hermione, Rowling turns the reader against her as well – making them believe that Hermione only tried to ruin their fun. When discussing a similar situation regarding a teacher, rather than Sirius, Veronica Schanoes says in her essay “Cruel Heroes and Treacherous Texts” that Rowling tricks, or seduces, the reader to join Harry's side

of the argument by only giving us his inner thoughts through narration, while Hermione is only represented through direct dialogue, and is therefore less appealing in the argument.

Heilman and Donaldson note that even though Hermione's knowledge and talents are helpful in our hero's quest it is more often than not that it is Harry's "stupid" bravery that really saves the day" (148). As we can see in the novels Rowling does enforce certain gender stereotypes, and despite this Hermione is often praised for being a feministic character. There are several moments in the novels that add up and show us that maybe Hermione is not as ground-breaking as she is believed to be. As with archetypal characters these gender stereotypes are something that we all can recognize and relate to. The archetypes are not inherently bad, while the stereotypes perpetuate prejudice. There is a danger in enforcing the stereotypes in children's literature, as they are harmful towards how the children learn to view gender, masculinity and femininity. Heilman and Donaldson mention why we feel drawn to certain characters in *Harry Potter*.

In addition, these gender ideologies are especially powerful because the books are pleasurable and popular. Part of the pleasure comes from the "comfort" of the stereotypes and the recognizable character types and situations. (140)

Archetypes recur "often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element in one's literary experience" (Frye 365), and additionally they become part of our human experience. These symbols and characters become so closely tied with how we see the world that they become familiar. But with this comfort and familiarity comes a certain danger; the harmful stereotyping – assigning entire groups of people (especially minorities) certain traits and telling the world that this is how people are supposed to act.

Female stereotypes are synonymous with powerlessness, and male stereotypes with power. But we can also differentiate between strong male characters and weak male characters in the *Harry Potter* series, which is what Heilman and Donaldson briefly mention in their essay.

In the Harry Potter book, boys are stereotypically portrayed, with the strong, adventurous, independent type of male serving as heroic expression of masculinity, while the weak, unsuccessful male is mocked and sometimes despised. (155)

Though Harry is admired for sharing feminine traits as well as masculine traits, there are other male characters that share the same traits as Harry but they are mocked instead of praised. Neville Longbottom does not have an athletic build and does not do well in class, but he is brave and very good in Herbology, which he only receives recognition for much later. Neville

is mocked throughout the series for being weak and stupid. Harry is not good in all subjects either, but rather than being mocked he is praised for the school subjects he does excel in. It most likely stems from the fact that everyone perceives Harry as a hero. Heilman and Donaldson also mention that R.W. Connell, a sociologist known for her studies of social theories of gender, claims that “some masculinities are more dominant than others” (156). Heilman and Donaldson add that this enables Harry to act in a dominant way over both men and women, while they are submissive.

Neville eventually stands up to his bullies and becomes an important part of Harry’s eventual victory by destroying one of the seven Horcruxes that needs to be eliminated in order to kill Voldemort. Much like Harry, Neville rises above his past and becomes a hero in his own right. Both of the characters were outsiders who became vital to the mission. But Neville was first introduced as “a round-faced boy” (*Philosopher’s Stone* 71, 90) who was very clumsy, and he was seen this way for most of the series. Heilman and Donaldson write that “Neville is a poor student and a poor athlete. The misery this boy experiences is a testament to the consequences of failed masculinity” and when he stands up for himself they describe it as “the trope of emerging masculinity” that echoes Harry’s, since “[b]oth begin as weak, skinny, outsiders, and yet become men” (158). This, I believe, only reinforces the stereotype that men are supposed to be physically strong, smart and handsome. Heilman and Donaldson say that Neville’s misery comes from “failed masculinity,” as if not being smart or athletic is the opposite of being masculine; this is a statement which is quite detrimental towards the fight to break the stereotypical way of thinking.

As previously mentioned Margery Hourihan is very critical towards the archetypal hero and the apparent sexism that exists within the myths. The hero in the western stories is more often than not a white male character. As children grow up with this their world view is limited to believing that only males can be heroes. Hourihan also gives us a more modern look at the archetypal hero as she mentions stories and films such as *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Where Wild Things Are*. The hero is often of European descent and in his mission he encounters various opponents that he is destined to defeat. The hero’s strength and bravery ensures that he will be victorious and is always superior to others.

Hourihan argues that since the hero story is told from his perspective the readers perceive the world from his point of view and that they are manipulated into sympathizing with the hero and his fate. The readers are so heavily connected to the hero that the hero becomes something of a higher being.

Because hero tales are narrated from the hero's point of view and because he occupies the foreground of the story, the reader is invited to share his values and admire his actions, although many heroes do things which most present-day readers would find questionable if they were presented differently. (39)

She goes on to say that, in these stories, women only matter if their actions affect the hero, and if they cannot offer any relevant support they are not important. It seems to correspond with the female characters in *Harry Potter*. Outside of Harry's interactions with them we do not know much about the female characters Hermione Granger, Ginny Weasley, or Minerva McGonagall.

The hero's story often leads to a "wild" place where the hero's mission is to liberate the savages from their uncivilized lifestyle. While this occurs in *Harry Potter* it is in fact Hermione that shoulders the "burden" of liberating the house elves from their slavery. The elves are happy where they are but Hermione is convinced that she knows better and that once they see what they can have the elves will want it. Hermione has always been praised for her intelligence, but in this instance she shows that she is more like the archetypal hero than originally believed. Whether she is conscious about it or not, she sees herself as the superior race and she asserts her dominance by taking away the elves' choice. It is a modified version of what Hourihan writes; she says that "[t]he hero is white, and his story inscribes the dominance of white power and white culture" (58). Instead of a power imbalance between white men and other races there is an imbalance between humans and creatures. Hermione's anthropocentric view of the world places her in the archetypal hero role, where all creatures are inferior and the humans are placed in the centre. Interestingly, one can both argue that this supports the fact that Hermione is a stereotype, but also that because it is a female figure, and not a male, that expresses this view, she breaks the stereotype. When there have been stories featuring a female hero she has very often taken on what is viewed as male characteristics as courage, aggression, and strength. It is not often we see a heroine who is feminine. According to Stephens' criteria for female stereotypes, when a female takes an active role she is often seen as evil (19).

Ron also displays these kinds of feelings of superiority towards other "races", e.g. werewolves. He tells his teacher to "[g]et away from [him], werewolf!" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 253) when he finds out that Lupin is a werewolf. Ron also expresses dominance towards giants and house elves, believing that they are inferior to him. The people we consider to be the *good guys* in the novels are acting in similar ways that the antagonists do. One of the main



antagonists, Malfoy, is constantly looking down on “Mudbloods” and “Muggles”, i.e. people who have non-magical parents, or are non-magical themselves. By assigning Ron, a protagonist, values that express superiority and discrimination, Rowling shows critique towards them. She is also showing the reader that racism is not only a character trait found in evil people, but also in good people who were raised in a society where these values are considered the norm. The Wizarding world is hidden from Muggles, and the wizards and witches believe that the non-magical people would only hurt them and that they would be a burden. When Harry asks why they must keep magic a secret, he is told that “everyone’d be wantin’ magic solutions to their problems. Nah, we’re best left alone” [sic] (*Philosopher’s Stone* 51). This is reiterated in Rowling’s *Tales of Beedle the Bard*, where it says: “‘Let the Muggles manage without us!’ was the cry, as the wizards drew further and further apart from their non-magical brethren” (13). This way of viewing other “races” is then carried through generations and even the good guys share feelings of superiority and racism. By introducing multiple views on a subject Rowling gives the reader a chance to look at it critically. In her essay “The Choice between Good and Evil: An Analysis” Molly Peters says that “[a]s the Harry Potter series leaves an impression on the reader, J.K. Rowling’s perceptions become our own, reflecting societal norms and values” (56). Peters goes on to say that Rowling uses Harry’s choice, in particular, to “educate and engage” the reader (60). She calls Harry Potter “an unwavering moral compass” for Rowling’s readers (63). I agree with Peters; and since Harry is the main character and the hero, the reader is more likely to follow his advice. In creating a character that has become an icon, Rowling manages, to an extent, to influence an entire generation and their values.

In contrast to Harry as the moral compass there is Voldemort. In her essay Alice Mills claims that from a Jungian perspective Voldemort is the dark double of Harry’s father, but I would argue that Voldemort is the dark double of Harry himself. It is important to note that when Mills wrote and published her essay the *Harry Potter* series was still unfinished, so she looked at the series without having the complete picture. I believe that this affected the premise of her conclusion. She briefly mentions that there is “an uncanny resemblance” between Voldemort and Harry. Only four of the seven novels had been published when she wrote her essay, and it is not until later that the correlation between Voldemort and Harry is fully revealed. They are both orphans, growing up in the Muggle world without the knowledge of magic. And neither ever felt like they belonged until they came to Hogwarts, where they found a home. Their childhood is what ultimately shaped them into the hero and

the villain. Despite their similar childhoods, there is a big difference between them. Harry spent a little bit more than a year with his loving parents before they died, while Voldemort never experienced love in any way. It is also noteworthy that Harry's mother died protecting him, and it was her love that saved him from Voldemort's killing curse. Voldemort's father never loved his mother, and Voldemort was conceived when his father was under the influence of a love potion; meaning that there was no genuine love between them. Albus Dumbledore says in the first novel, "If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love" (216). And it is love that motivates Harry throughout the series. Rowling emphasizes that love matters the most in the end. Harry also had a connection to his real parents through his aunt, while Voldemort had no one. Mills later states, "[a]rchetypal energy depersonalizes human being, insofar as it possesses them and drives their behavior" (7). Harry goes outside the framework of the archetype as his motivation for fighting is love. There is a common belief that feelings and love are too feminine, and that masculinity means lack of emotions, and so Harry goes against the characterisation of the male stereotype in that regard.

### 3. Breaking the Stereotype

In this chapter I will discuss how *Harry Potter* breaks the gender stereotypes, and how Harry Potter is not simply an archetypal hero.

Rowling's novels are unusual among quest fantasies in their frequent and explicit shifts of archetypal imagery between characters. (Mills 8)

Alice Mills manages to capture the essence of *Harry Potter* in terms of archetypes in her essay. The characters are archetypal in their behaviour and structure, but they change and behave in unexpected ways. Harry Potter is the hero – but he often strays from the archetype, yet manages to find his way back in order to once again become the archetypal hero.

It is not only the archetypal hero that breaks the mould. The female characters also show individuality. For example, there is no real damsel in distress in the novels. Ginny Weasley, the “victim” in the second *Harry Potter* novel turns out to be one of the strongest women in the series, and she is the one the hero goes to for support in the end. In a way the one true archetypal figure is Voldemort since he shows no guilt, regret or goodness. He is the one character who is purely evil. The other main villains - Severus Snape, Draco Malfoy, and Peter Pettigrew – show remorse or in some cases turn out to be one of the good guys. Most characters, including Harry himself, have both good and evil in them.

As previously mentioned, the archetypal hero of romance is always courageous, strong and victorious. Harry Potter is many of those things; however, he also has many other (not so heroic) traits – he is filled with doubt, jealousy, and he is lonely. In the first novel, Harry doubts himself when Hagrid tells him that he is a wizard. “‘Hagrid’, he said quietly, ‘I think you must have made a mistake. I don’t think I can be a wizard’” (47). Harry’s childhood with no positive reinforcement meant that Harry never felt that he was special, and instead of making him feel hatred, it made him humble and able to feel compassion and sympathy for others, unlike the archetypal hero. For the first time in his life someone said he was special, but for Harry this seems impossible. In contrast, when Voldemort found out that he was a wizard he replied with, “‘I knew I was different,’ he whispered to his own quivering fingers. ‘I knew I was special. Always, I knew there was something’” (*Half-Blood Prince* 254). Voldemort has always felt as though he was better than others, and learning that he was a wizard only reinforced those beliefs. It is this view that later leads him to become the Dark Lord.

Rowling allows Harry to fail and to be vulnerable, instead of putting him on a pedestal where he is viewed as a perfect hero. He is plagued by feelings of uncertainty, which goes

against how Frye describes the way heroes and villains work in romantic myth; he claims the romantic myth “presents an idealized world” and that “in romance heroes are brave, heroines beautiful, villains villainous, and the frustrations, ambiguities, and embarrassments of ordinary life are made little of” (151). And thus Frye’s idealization of the romantic myth, in which I have chosen to place *Harry Potter*, does not completely correspond with the book series. The hero is brave and the villain(s) villainous; however, the heroines are not merely beautiful and the, as Frye calls it, “embarrassments” are not trivial.

Another trait unbecoming the hero is jealousy, which is an underlying theme in the fourth novel. Harry’s best friend, Ron, gets jealous when Harry receives all the attention because of circumstances Harry cannot control. In turn Harry is jealous of Ron who does not have to deal with the fame and scrutiny that comes with being viewed as a hero. Harry feels envious of Ron’s large and loving family, never having experienced that himself. Our hero also feels jealous towards one of their classmates, Cedric, since he is dating the girl that Harry has a crush on in the fourth novel. This also happens when Harry has a crush on Ginny Weasley, when she is dating someone else.

The hero is often depicted as a strong male who defeats his enemies by using his strength. The stereotypically masculine traits are synonymous with violence, according to Stephens (18). Harry, however, chooses the non-violent route in many situations. Harry uses his wit and logic to solve problems, rather than brute strength, often with the help of Hermione. Most notably when faced with Voldemort he uses spells which do not have a fatal outcome. Voldemort uses the spell *Avada Kedavra* which is known as the *Killing Curse*, as well as the *Cruciatius Curse*, which is likened to physical torture. Harry, however, relies on the disarming spell *Expelliarmus* and other relatively harmless spells. Harry even feels compassion and sympathy towards Voldemort when he learns of Voldemort’s past. He learns that Voldemort’s mother did not try to stay alive when she was starving even though she could have used magic to survive. As Harry put it, ““She wouldn’t even stay alive for her son?””. To which Dumbledore asks, “[c]ould you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?”” (*Half-Blood Prince* 246).

Harry’s use of the harmless spells in the first couple of novels can be explained by his lack of knowledge; the *unforgivable curses* are not taught in school. However, in the fifth novel Harry has some knowledge of the *Cruciatius Curse*, and after the death of his godfather, Sirius Black, Harry tries to use the *Cruciatius Curse* on Sirius’ murderer, Bellatrix Lestrange. Harry’s spells at this point are fuelled by his anger and grief, and not by his inherent need for

violence which seems to be a trait of the stereotypical male. But it is not enough, as Bellatrix says, “[y]ou need to *mean* them, Potter! You need to really want to cause pain – to enjoy it – righteous anger won’t hurt me for long – I’ll show you how it is done, shall I?” (715)

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* Harry duels with his enemy, Draco Malfoy, and in the heat of the moment Harry uses a spell that cuts Malfoy’s face and chest. Harry did not know what the spell did, and had not expected the spell to cause actual harm, and when it does he freezes.

’No-’ gasped Harry.

Slipping and staggering, Harry got to his feet and plunged towards Malfoy, whose face was now shining scarlet, his white hand scrabbling at his blood-soaked chest.

’No- I didn’t-‘

[...] Harry was still watching, horrified by what he had done [...]

’I didn’t mean it to happen,’ said Harry at once. His voice echoed in the cold, watery space. ’I didn’t know what that spell did.’ (489-90)

Harry was obviously shocked at what he had done, not intending to harm Malfoy to such degree. It was done in the heat of a battle, and seconds before Malfoy had prepared to cast one of the unforgivable curses, *Cruciatius*, so Harry’s actions can be seen as self-defence. But his adversity to violence indicates that he did not mean to harm anyone, much unlike the archetypal hero who relies on his strength and violence.

The stereotypical female’s aversion to violence is not present in Hermione, as she has actually shown violent tendencies when Harry did not. In the third novel *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, there is a moment when Malfoy, insults one of their friends after an emotional situation and both Harry and Ron “made furious moves towards Malfoy” (216) but it is Hermione who gets there first and slaps Malfoy in the face, shocking everyone. For once, Hermione is taking an active role when it comes to stereotypically male situations that require violence. Stephens claims that male stereotypes are often more violent, strong and aggressive, while female stereotypes are beautiful, non-violent and obedient. He also says that it is “undesirable” to cross these boundaries and a man who conforms to the stereotype is “socially desirable” (18-19).

I do not think that Rowling set out to write a feminist piece of literature - she could not even use her own name in fear that a female writer would alienate a younger male audience. Despite adhering to certain stereotypes from time to time, Rowling manages to write female characters that are, in the end, strong and powerful. Ginny Weasley is, at first glance, only a love interest to the hero. She is struck mute when meeting him, but she evolves into a woman who in the end is one of the few characters, whom Harry trusts, who is not afraid to tell Harry

what she thinks. Hermione is often viewed as a strong independent character, and taking a closer look shows that she is not one-dimensional and has more than one set of character traits, which only makes her more human and complex. In my first chapter I concluded that Hermione does conform to the stereotype from time to time. However, it is her intelligence and her eagerness to help, combined with her emotional side that makes a good representation of a multidimensional female character. Often it is a choice between either being smart or being emotional and vulnerable. Rowling has created a character which embraces both sides, even in the face of adversity. Even though Hermione functions as an aide in Harry's quest, she is also one of the main reasons that Harry becomes victorious in the end. Without her Harry and Ron would be lost. Heilman and Donaldson remark upon the fact that Hermione shows personal ambition at last, in *Deathly Hallows*, when she tells the Minister for Magic that she does not want to work in law, since she is hoping to actually "do some good in the world!" (105). Heilman and Donaldson says that "[w]ith this ambition Hermione separates herself from her partnership with Ron and Harry that has defined her and possibly restricted her for the past six years" (144). But is it too little, too late? Hermione's role is quite ambiguous in the novels since she changes from one stereotype to another, to none at all. Sometimes she is the emotional female, the assistant and other times she is submissive and compliant.

In the first novel Hermione gets teased multiple times by Ron for her over-eagerness and studious nature. But later in the same novel Harry and Ron praise her for her knowledge of different spells. Harry shares many traits with the archetypal hero, but is also not afraid to rely on his friends, especially his female friends. He embraces not only the masculine parts of himself, but also the feminine parts. He is strong but allows himself to be emotional and vulnerable as well. Character traits such as being emotional, vulnerable, caring and dependent are often seen as stereotypically feminine, and subsequently weaker, according to Stephens (18-19). All these traits can be applied to Harry as well; Rowling allows the male hero of the story to be feminine, which is rather uncommon. Although it is seen as stereotypically feminine, Harry often shows that he is capable of loving someone. However, Harry reacts more like the stereotypical male sometimes. When Ginny has a crush on Harry she becomes shy around him, and unable to speak. However, later on when Harry has a crush on her, while she is dating someone else, he reacts with jealousy and anger – two aggressive traits that once again are typically attributed to males. Even when experiencing a stereotypically feminine trait like love, Rowling makes Harry react like a stereotypical male. Rowling had the chance

to break the stereotype, but instead she fell into the trap of enforcing stereotypes. Harry acts more like the archetypal hero in this instance, where women are seen as a prize to be won or an object to be given.

Neither of them seemed to have noticed that a fierce battle was raging inside Harry's brain:  
*She's Ron's sister.*  
But she ditched Dean!  
*She's still Ron's sister.*  
I'm his best mate!  
*That'll make it worse.*  
If I talked to him first-  
*He'd hit you.*  
What if I don't care?  
*He's your best mate! (Half-Blood Prince 482)*

It is the perfect example of showing that Harry sometimes acts against the archetype - he is emotional and loving – but that he also conforms to the stereotype by reacting aggressively.

## 4. Conclusion

My thesis for this essay is that despite following the archetypal hero narrative, and sharing many of its traits, *Harry Potter* goes against many of the stereotypes that exist. At first this sounded pretty easy; however, it turned out that the answer was more ambiguous than I first thought. Though Harry Potter can easily be described as the archetypal hero (his heroic journey proves this), it is the characteristics that he possesses that ultimately separate him from the archetype. As I have tried to prove, Harry is indeed like the archetype in romance: a leader, strong, and dominant, but he is also capable of being emotional and vulnerable, and often chooses the non-violent route. He has many sides and is a complex character, which cannot be reduced to a simple archetype, since that would mean ignoring several traits that make Harry Potter such a beloved character.

I also wanted to examine the gender stereotypes in *Harry Potter* since many of the archetypal hero stories are sexist. I mostly focused on Hermione Granger, the main female character. In future endeavours it might be pertinent to look at several other female characters, and compare them with other male characters, not just Harry and Hermione, to get a more complete analysis. Although Rowling's female characters are not portrayed in a clear negative manner, they are sometimes made inferior to the male characters. Hermione is a helper and assistant to Harry Potter. Even though she is more than capable she often relies on Harry to make the important decisions for her. I was proven quite wrong since I expected Hermione not to conform to the stereotype, and Harry to be more like the archetype, when in fact it was the opposite. The characters display both feminine and masculine traits throughout the series, and so I do not believe that I have reached a definite answer to the question whether Rowling's characters are stereotypes or not. In some instances Rowling conforms to the stereotypes, and in some instances she breaks them.



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