

Roger Williams University

DOCS@RWU

Arts & Sciences Faculty Publications

Arts and Sciences

2008

Hermione Granger as Young Girl Sleuth in the Harry Potter Series

Glenna M. Andrade

Roger Williams University, Gandrade8474@outlook.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/fcas_fp



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Andrade, Glenna M. 2008. "Hermione Granger as Young Girl Sleuth in the Harry Potter Series." In *Critical Readings of Nancy Drew and Other Girl Sleuths*, edited by Michael Cornelius. McFarland. ISBN 978-0-7864-3995-9.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Arts and Sciences at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Arts & Sciences Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

Abstract: Hermione Granger as Girl Sleuth in the *Harry Potter* Series

Reappearing in the long tradition of girl sleuths such as Carolyn Keene's Nancy Drew, Hermione Granger interrupts the centrality of the male-fantasy-adventure in the *Harry Potter* series. Throughout the novels, Hermione asserts her own subjecthood and participates in a shared agency to change from a scared girl into a woman battling for justice. Clearly, the *Harry Potter* series can affect readers differently. Some may perceive the comparisons to the Nancy Drew role of Era Three when Hermione uses her wits to detect clues, solve mysteries, and uncover suspects and their motives. Although others may stereotype Hermione as the conventional female helpmate, still others may find that her take-charge personality affirms that her role is equal to Harry's. Unlike Nancy Drew, however, Hermione engages in social activism, thus subverting the wizarding world's dominant values and matching feminism's more humanistic aims. In the end, Hermione's adventures can offer young girl readers a newer role model to address the typical adolescent tasks of seeking independent action, learning when to conform (or not), working cooperatively with others, using knowledge for real purposes, and of contributing to the larger community to better others' circumstances. Using cultural and feminist criticism, this investigation concludes that readers can approve of Hermione's disruption of the male fantasy adventure genre and admire her maturation into a keener adult role model who thinks clearly, lives justly, and works for others beyond the world of fantasy.

Published as "Hermione Granger as Young Girl Sleuth in the *Harry Potter* Series," in *Nancy Drew: Critical Readings of Nancy Drew and Other Girl Sleuths*. Ed. Michael Cornelius. McFarland, 2008, ISBN 978-0-7864-3995-9.

Hermione Granger as Girl Sleuth

Glenna Andrade

Trap doors, wardrobes with concealed compartments, secret rooms, and mysterious maps: these are just a few examples of the similar items found in both the Nancy Drew mysteries and in the Harry Potter series. More important, appearing in the tradition of girl sleuth is Hermione Granger in her role of young female detective. As such, Hermione evolves from a long development of girl sleuths that generally commenced and climaxed with the Nancy Drew series that codified the independent girl detective in juvenile fiction (Craig and Cadogan 149). Like Carolyn Keene's Nancy, Hermione is a superior girl sleuth of intelligence and action. She uses her wits to detect

clues, unravel riddles, expose suspects and their motives, and solve mysteries, often more skillfully than Harry Potter himself. Although not as athletic as Harry, she takes individual action to not only track down research and pursue adventures, but also to fight energetically against villains.

Because the sleuth and the fantasy adventure hero adventure genres are intertwined, Hermione's role as Nancy Drew sleuth complicates the Potter series. Since genre is both a literary focus and a social construction (Bishop and Ostrom xiii), both types of heroes are part of a literary tradition constructed by cultural conventions over a long period of time. Even though many stories incorporate elements of other genres, such as when a romance includes detective elements or when historical fiction integrates adventure hero qualities, each hero remains central within the formula of his or her genre.

While various definitions of the detective and the hero abound, the following descriptions provide a beginning to compare the heroes of both plot-driven formulas. Within the young girl detective genre, Hermione takes up the sleuth role as the independent young female whose curiosity and intelligence induce her to take action in solving mysteries even when she must break rules, all the while showing confidence and competence while avoiding distractions, yet keeping her femininity as she tracks down research, pursues adventures, and fights villains, thereby restoring justice to society.

In contrast to the sleuth's working in the "real world," the male adventurer inhabits the fantasy genre, thus Harry may be seen as the hero who is the brave male youth with magical powers who begins as an outcast, but who is called to his quest, during which he leads helpful companions in his adventures, overcomes various

supernatural villains and beasts, and frequently descends into an underworld with the purpose of defeating evil so as to re-establish stability in the world.

In part because of his wizarding lineage, Harry stars as the adventure hero of the fantasy; alternately, Hermione's non-wizarding origin or "Muggle" status situates her in the relatively "realistic" realm of detective fiction. Both share the heroic quest to fight injustice and evil so as to restore order to society, yet each uses the sleuthing methods of one genre and magic of the other. When the genre boundaries overlap as in the Potter series, the competing sleuth role can become suppressed, yet disruptive.

Just as Nancy Drew initiates action in her own realm of River Heights, when Hermione takes agency in the Potter series, she intervenes in Hogwarts culture. The concept of "agency," which is to advocate for oneself, includes the "capability" of both the internal capacities for making choices and the external conditions that permit them (Nussbaum qtd. in Gardiner 13). Clearly, the showcasing of the male-fantasy-adventure hero is one external condition that constricts choice. In other words, when Hermione performs as a girl detective in the Potter novels, the emphasis on the male adventure inhibits her agency. Nevertheless, as Hermione's character develops during the series, she begins to defy the stereotype of the hero's female sidekick when she evolves into an independent thinker and an active sleuth whose talents often undercuts the focus on Harry Potter; moreover, Hermione continues to grow in subjecthood and agency even after her part is lessened when the series refocuses on the fantasy genre.

At the start, Hermione earns her role as sleuth in *The Sorcerer's Stone* through her quest for knowledge and her intelligence. Like Nancy Drew, Hermione's acumen runs the gamut from being perceptive to analyzing clues and to preparing in advance for

upcoming adventures. For instance, attempting to retrieve the Sorcerer's Stone during the attic scene, Hermione is the first of the Harry-Ron-Hermione trio to spy the trapdoor to the subterranean realm, thus demonstrating Nancy Drew's keen power of observation (MacLeod 444). Later in *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Hermione identifies its creator and connects it to the object being protected by the dog in the attic (220). Even before the adventure, she plans ahead by looking up enchantments they may need to break (SS 271). Thus, Hermione, like Nancy Drew, is "serious, competent, disciplined, and determined" (MacLeod 446). Whereas Harry is sometimes impulsive, Hermione provides the role model of the hero who keenly observant and who anticipates consequences. Akin to Nancy Drew, Hermione conforms to the sleuth of girl detective fiction who uses intelligence to solve mysteries, in contrast to earlier heroines who depended upon mere hunches and intuition (Craig and Cadogen 237). Not too incidentally, the boys thank Hermione for her knowledge of Herbology after she saves them from the Devil's Snare during the attic scene (SS 278).

After her introduction as sleuth in *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Hermione's detective qualities strengthen in the *Chamber of Secrets* when she uncovers suspects, reads clues, and plans ahead. Instead of following Harry's lead, she initiates the plan to uncover suspects by volunteering to make a Polyjuice potion so the trio can impersonate the henchmen of the young villain Draco Malfoy to gather information surreptitiously (CS 155-166). In fact, the ability to create clever disguises is a signature Nancy Drew trait (Craig and Cadogan 79). Furthermore, at the Chamber of Secrets' entrance, Hermione deduces that whatever petrified a cat could not be human, and discovers the clue that the

spiders are marching, to show, like a proper girl sleuth, no fear of spiders, whereas Ron is terrified (CS 154).

Accepting that some rules must be broken for a higher purpose, Hermione leads the boys to infringe upon them. Moments after the spider discovery, Hermione persuades Ron and Harry to defy the prohibition against entering the girls' bathroom to investigate the mystery further (CS 155). Later, Hermione violates numerous school policies, as when she steals a teacher's signature, pinches a restricted library book (CS 162-164), and even steals ingredients from a professor's office (CS 186). She is like Nancy Drew who will eavesdrop, break and enter, and even search someone's room to pursue a higher cause.

When questioned about the Polyjuice potion, Hermione makes the moral decision that breaking the rules is better than doing nothing about the threat to the students (CS 165-166). Whereas Hermione's rule-breaking in *The Sorcerer's Stone* does reinforce the status quo of the female who disobeys authority to further the males' goals rather than her personal ones as Ruthann Mayes-Elma points out (93), Hermione is not punished by an authority figure in *The Chamber of Secrets*, thus avoids "the traditional construction of gender" (Mayes-Elma 94). Additionally, in resisting Hogwart's male culture, she actually orders the boys to create a diversion so as to steal the ingredients (CS 186), a trait of independence reminiscent of Nancy Drew (Caprio 51). Then, too, while some subjugated women feel "remorseful and ashamed afterwards" for rule breaking (Mayes-Elma 94), Hermione experiences neither in *The Chamber of Secrets*. This change from companion to co-conspirator becomes a major turning point in Hermione's development as the sleuth who decides what must be done and how to do it, regardless of the rules. Hence, the

emerging focus on Hermione's qualities as smart girl sleuth begins to undercut the primacy of Harry's position as male fantasy hero. Because readers can engage in "distancing" (Bennett qtd. in Smith 319) to distinguish between the sleuth and the fantasy genres whenever boundaries shift, readers can admire Hermione's increasing independence and agency as well as Harry's character traits.

Just as it motivates Nancy Drew, curiosity inspires Hermione to set off on her first separate adventure in *The Chamber of Secrets*. Although the escapade is told in retrospect, Hermione has succeeded in identifying the Basilisk that terrorizes Hogwarts. Granted, she is found petrified, and she may have been intrepid to the point of foolhardiness, yet she retains her Nancy-like self-possession (Craig and Cadogan 152) when she awakens and explains her actions, undaunted by the experience. The scene is even reminiscent of the many times Nancy is rendered unconscious by some dastardly villain. Again, Hermione had prepared for the adventure beforehand. When discovered unconscious, Hermione is holding a mirror that averts the effects of the monster's stare (CS 157). In her hand are still further clues. She clutches the library page that describes the Basilisk's traits and that explains the spiders' march as a retreat from the monster's presence. The page contains her handwritten clue "Pipes" which identifies the entrance of the Chamber of Secrets in the girls' bathroom (CS 291). Therefore, while Hermione was unsuccessful in confronting the monster, readers can admire her curiosity, research, and initiative to act alone—all substantiating Hermione's Nancy Drew-like qualities. She neither asked for help, nor admitted she was wrong in initiating her adventure, just as Nancy Drew would not (Caprio 51). Hermione does not apologize for failing, and this

lack of repentance seems to be more typical of a “man” who is “not supposed to give [rule breaking] enough thought to be sorry or regretful” (Elma-Mayes 94).

As Hermione’s character grows in capability and assertiveness, she functions more adeptly as a co-leader in the later novels. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, she not only receives praise (346) for her quick thinking during the werewolf fray and for solving the werewolf mystery, but also exhibits increasing assertiveness. As she chides Hagrid for his drunkenness, she is not simply a rule-enforcer in word, but vigorously dumps out his tankard (*PA* 121). She breaks the passive female role when she slaps Draco Malfoy for insulting Hagrid (*PA* 326). She even resists adult male power when she interrupts the authoritarian Professor Snape during a highly charged event (*PA* 359). Confidence and assertiveness affirmed, Hermione engages in the role of co-leader during the Time-Turner episode. She tells Harry what to do and then must restrain him when he begins to act impulsively during a precarious moment (*PA* 395-409). Because they alternate leadership, Harry acknowledges their shared agency to Dumbledore when he says, “We did it” (*PA* 418) which is not so much a usurpation of the female as it is admiration for her intellectual powers, decisiveness, and action.

Hermione’s shared leadership continues in *The Order of the Phoenix* when her actions verify her invention, persuasion, and even fighting ability. When she, Harry, and Ron are in a tight spot, Hermione spontaneously concocts a plan to deflect Professor Umbridge from the trio’s real purpose to save Harry’s godfather (*OP* 749-52). She misdirects the villainous Umbridge into the Forbidden Forest and pleads for Harry’s and her own release boldly and effectively (*OP* 757). As a co-leader, Hermione’s quick wit and persuasion rescues the pair from what could be a failed adventure. Equally important,

Hermione embodies a new role as a vigorous fighter during the conclusion of *The Order of the Phoenix*. Though as usual she casts spells, assesses dangers, and reacts quickly when she accompanies Harry and others on their rescue of Sirius at the Department of Mysteries, she now engages in actual combat. Rather than see Hermione as a token presence of the female in the action scene, but who fails (Heilman 225), Hermione's new role as the intrepid fighter in the battle for justice proves she has far outgrown any girlish terror.

In addition to leadership and action, Hermione shows herself to be a deep thinker. Just as she has insight into some villains' intentions, a trait comparable with Nancy Drew, Hermione has examined even the hero's motivation and has the temerity to speak candidly. She articulates what she sees as Harry's weakness. When Harry is about to act impulsively to save Sirius, Hermione questions him: "Don't you think you've got a bit of a--a--saving-people thing'?" (OP 733). Although he avoids this possibility, he does pause and adopt Hermione's plan of rescue. Therefore, while Hermione may tell white lies to save the day or to accomplish a mission with a greater purpose, she evolves into a truth-teller, the independent co-leader who does not shirk from speaking out honestly so the other hero can assess his own vulnerability. In fact, her personal introspection has come earlier than Harry's. Although both the sleuth and fantasy genres tend to preclude self-examination because they are mostly plot-driven, Hermione has already recognized her fear in failing (PA 319) whereas Harry shows little introspection until two novels later when he admits to himself that he must be independent from protectors and mentors (HBP 645). In the parabola of both plots, Hermione's self-recognition peaks earlier than Harry's, suggesting she has matured sooner and is far wiser.

In spite of Hermione's maturation through the Potter series, her sleuth role lessens dramatically in *The Goblet of Fire*, but reappears qualitatively in *The Half-Blood Prince*. Even though she has no separate adventures, Hermione continues to refine her sleuth capabilities. In contrast to the usual female associate who asks questions of the male detective that propels the plot (Craig and Cadogan 85) Hermione continually makes connections that Harry overlooks. To prevent him from following a red herring, she corrects him about a previous event during which Draco Malfoy was interested in the Vanishing Cabinet (*HBP* 254). Even as Harry is confused by the Marauder's Map, Hermione explains why it could not depict Malfoy's presence. Moreover, it is she who solves the identity of the Half-Blood Prince as Snape, the most compelling mystery in this novel, and even works out his motive (*HBP* 637- 638). Hermione's deductions are akin to the young girl detective's instant assumptions that are always accurate (Craig and Cadogan 155); Harry's mistakes reveal his sleuth incapacity. In addition, Hermione appears to be a better co-leader than Ron. More often than not, Harry tests out his theories on Hermione who confirms them, corrects them, follows with further ideas, substantiates them with research, or even pursues her own solitary adventures for more information. In short, Hermione contributes more thoughtfulness and wisdom to the shared agency than the sidekick Ron, who frequently just listens and wonders.

Appropriately, Hermione's role diminishes when the genre steers away from realism to re-center upon the fantasy hero's adventures, such as in *The Half-Blood Prince*; nonetheless, Hermione returns to her sleuth capacity with even more expertise in *The Deathly Hallows*. Once again, she plays the Nancy Drew character who steals books, but now from Dumbledore's personal library (*DH* 101). She not only plans ahead by

packing camping equipment in her magical beaded bag, but also creates several clever disguises that work well (*DH* 522) instead of backfiring as during her first attempt (*SS* 271). Certainly readers must applaud Hermione for her continuing focus in *The Deathly Hallows* when she insists early on that Harry should concentrate on destroying the Horcruxes (objects containing pieces of Voldemort's soul) (100) and when steers the boys back on this track, during the battle at Hogwarts (640). She not only anticipates Voldemort's presence in Godric's Hallow which had not occurred to Harry (100), but also acts quickly to give Harry a flask to save Snape's memories when Harry did not know what to do (*DH* 657). She even shows a greater loyalty to the quest than Ron who leaves Harry mid-way during their sufferings in their escape into the wilderness. Finally, Hermione's best trait, her unwavering logic, is admired by the wise wizard Xenophiles Lovegood who praises her for pointing out his fallacy when she replies that someone "could claim anything is true if the only basis is that nobody proved otherwise" (*DH* 411). Therefore, Hermione's finer Nancy Drew qualities help compensate for Harry's impulsiveness, tendency to distraction, and occasional slip in decisiveness in the final novel. In fact, Dumbledore admits that he had always counted on Hermione's presence to slow down Harry's impulsiveness (*DH* 720).

In addition to interfering with the focus on Harry as the fantasy adventurer because of her sleuth capabilities, Hermione deflects interest from him when she adopts the role of romance heroine in *The Goblet of Fire*. Arriving at the Yule Ball transformed into a lovely woman, she is even accompanied by a sports super-star, to the admiration of the boys and the envy of other girls (*GF* 414-422). In some ways, Krum portrays the ideal mate for someone like Hermione or Nancy whose superior qualities deserve the best

partner. Obviously, Hermione's manifestation as romance heroine can influence readers differently. Since Hermione's physical appearance has been downplayed or ignored, when girl readers see Hermione as beautiful, some may feel a "sense of power, or resolution, or achievement" (Eagleton 92). Others can view the change as diminishing her smart detective role because the fictional romance can elicit "dissatisfaction as much as submission" (Eagleton 92). Overall, any reader can step back and evaluate the character's choices because the romance heroine functions as a "placeholder" (Kinsale 32). Even a reader who sees the prom queen role as a diminishment of Hermione's character might recognize that she does not subsequently care much about the standards of beauty, thus suggesting that she rejects this cultural script, especially since she is neither frivolous or vain, thus countering some more typical "feminine" weaknesses (McLeod 445).

Hermione's sports star date is more an ornamental accompaniment to affirm her physical improvement and her acceptance in the Hogwarts social realm than a true love interest. Krum is so "bland" and "boring" like Nancy Drew's Ned (MacLeod 448) that Hermione shows little real attraction to him. Although interested in dating, as is normal for her maturation, she does not fawn over her date nor engage in silly "snogging," like the bewitched Ron.

In short, Hermione's interlude as a romance heroine allows readers to approve or disapprove of Hermione's change, since the romance "simultaneously challenges and reaffirms traditional values, behavior and attitudes" (Modleski 112). In connection with the 1950s Nancy-Drew tradition, Hermione subordinates her romantic inclinations to claim her own space as sleuth. Like Nancy, Hermione just has more important goals than to be sidetracked by romance; nonetheless, she is not insensitive about dating: she later

listens sympathetically and advises Ginny about love-relationships in *The Half-Blood Prince* (647), and thus adopts another Nancy Drew role, that of matchmaker (Caprio 37). In the long run, the new spotlight on Hermione's role as romance heroine may distract, if only in the interim, from the centrality of the male hero's fantasy-adventure.

Further, Hermione reconfirms her independence when she returns as sleuth and now succeeds in a personal adventure. Targeted by a sleazy journalist for dating Harry's competitor in *The Goblet of Fire*, Hermione not only tracks down the journalist (548) and solves the mystery of how the spy illegally recorded private conversations, but also captures her in a glass jar sealed with a spell (727-728). In contrast to previous misadventures, Hermione triumphs that she has succeeded in solving her own mystery separately (*GF* 728), and she even replicates the role of justice hero, specifically helping others who have endured Rita Skeeter's gossip. Moreover, Hermione continues as a smart sleuth when she convinces Rita to publish an article revealing the conspiracy to hide the problem of Voldemort's return (*OP* 567). Hence, Hermione shows subjecthood and agency in persuading a former scoundrel to use the newspaper for the political benefit of denouncing evil. In this way, the realism of the sleuth genre contributes to solving a specific social problem in the wizarding realm.

Where Hermione breaks more clearly free of the classic Nancy Drew role is when she becomes a social activist for the house elves in *The Goblet of Fire*. Outraged by their enslavement, Hermione begins a grass-roots organization called The Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare or S-P-E-W (*GF* 224), confronts the Hogwarts' students about the elves' working conditions (*GF* 239), approves the now-freed Dobby as a new role model (*GF* 383), begins a movement to educate the students, and even addresses the

elves collectively about their right to wages (*GF* 538). Thus, Hermione assumes agency in advocating for the rights of the oppressed, a role in keeping with modern feminism, since campaigning for other marginalized groups is “closely tied to the oppression of women” (Warhol and Herndl x). Simply put, when Hermione follows feminism's more general goal to bring positive social changes to the world, readers of Rowling’s popular novels can learn which behaviors “to emulate or shun” and so help reconfigure “the social and political order” (Tompkins xvii). The sleuth plot becomes a space where readers can try out Hermione’s activism in preparation for re-entry into the world outside the text. Unlike Nancy Drew who is often a “vigilante, but not a reformer” (Craig and Cadogan 158), Hermione facilitates social improvement through political means.

As *The Order of the Phoenix* progresses, however, Hermione’s well-meaning activism is less significant to the story line. Readers hear only a scattering of Hermione’s abolitionist plans. Whereas Hermione’s efforts are mocked and the elves remain impressed under a conservative hegemony (Heilman and Gregory 245), at the very least Hermione’s activism has changed other people’s minds. Dumbledore admits that the elves’ enslavement has caused discontent and even rebellion (*OP* 852) and offers them wages for their work at Hogwarts. While SPEW is rarely mentioned again in the next novel, *The Half-Blood Prince*, Hermione’s influence emerges in Harry’s new sympathy for the house-elves’ conditions (439). Further, in *The Deathly Hallows*, Ron’s mind has changed to wanting to protect them from Voldemort (*DH* 625) whereupon the elves join forces against the villain in battle (*DH* 734). In contrast to one feminist critic who views Hermione’s fight for the house elves as another form of female, sacrificial behavior (Bradshaw “Hermione as Sacrificial Lamb”), Hermione’s intervention supports the

feminist goal of bringing positive social changes. It may be that Hermione's social intervention is necessarily downplayed because in pushing beyond the boundary of the girl sleuth genre, the theme of political activism begins to threaten the formula's familiarity and stability, and even further destabilizes the focus on the fantasy hero's adventures.

However, not all readers appreciate Hermione's role as intellectual girl sleuth in the Harry Potter series. Some say that as the "know-it-all," she only preserves the typical female role in *The Sorcerer's Stone* (Mayes-Elma 97). Nonetheless, Hermione's aptitude and pursuit of knowledge become essential to Harry and Ron. Their initial disapproval of her knowledge confirms her role as the smart girl sleuth who is generally mocked for her intellect, and even reflects badly on the boys' behavior. On the positive side, Hermione's intelligence does break the stereotype of the tag-along, dumb female companion in the action adventure genre, undermining the image of the passive female. Typecasting Hermione as a "know-it-all" is not unlike saying that all boys who are facile at computers are "nerds." Additionally, when Harry and Ron criticize Hermione as "bossy and nosey" (SS 164) early in the first novel, their displeasure can be understood as criticizing Hermione's behavior rather than her brains. Her bossiness may evolve from feeling insecure in a new social milieu where she has not yet confirmed her position.

Hermione suffers from other emotional pressures too. As a Muggle, she is especially conscious of the amount of learning she must acquire about wizarding. Hermione must study diligently because she attends boarding school based on her aptitude in contrast to those students from wizard families. She even suffers from prejudice as a "Mudblood" (an insult to those born with magical powers, but without

wizardry ancestry). Clearly, Hermione must prove her worth to be socially acceptable. On the one hand, her quest for knowledge is like that of Nancy Drew's interest in serious reading, in contrast to her sidekicks, who often prefer games (MacLeod 445) or sports. That she is teased for perpetually reading and studying sets up a contrast to the boys who only do enough to get by. Her eccentricity is a convention that actually serves to distinguish her from main characters in other detective stories (MacDonald 70). On the other hand, Hermione eventually recognizes that her exaggerated need to achieve stems from great fear of failing (*PA* 319) and that her self-imposed stress was not worth the agony (*PA* 430). In a more serious vein, Hermione, like Nancy Drew, must resolve this personal inner mystery (Caprio 105) so as to become a more enlightened person (Caprio 126).

In contrast to one critic who postulates that Hermione gains acceptance through her alliance with Harry's own high status (Dresang 226 quoted in Bradshaw), Hermione earns her position through her thinking and actions, to the admiration of Harry and Ron and others. Much like the conventional male adventure hero, Hermione begins as a Muggle "outcast" so that her virtues will later shine. Thus, while some critics perceive that women are marginalized in the Hogwarts' world, others champion Hermione's efforts to prove her subjecthood as a capable young woman in this new realm.

Hermione's quest for knowledge is, as Mayes-Elma points out, a necessary part of her identity (92). Undoubtedly Hermione is introduced as a "know-it-all" to contrast her change from submissive to assertive and from competitive to cooperative. Clearly, Hermione is frightened and submissive during the mountain troll event in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. When she is discovered "shrinking against the wall opposite, looking as if she [is]

about to faint” (SS 175), Hermione’s behavior in the bathroom scene is stereotypical and does suggest that women are ruled by their emotions as Melissa Bradshaw points out (“Hermione as Sacrificial Lamb”). That this behavior happens “frequently” is Bradshaw’s overstatement since Hermione changes through the series. Bradshaw does make a good observation when she points out that Hermione could have saved herself because she had earlier taught Ron the levitation spell he uses to rescue her (“Hermione as Sacrificial Lamb”), but anyone, male or female, might react with terror when surprised by an evil monster, especially for the first time. At least Harry and Ron were forewarned before the confrontation. More than likely, the author began with the stereotype of the “wimpy girl” so Hermione could transcend it; and in fact, Hermione changes at the scene’s conclusion. She immediately decides to disobey the rules at Hogwarts, thus beginning her journey to adventure, mystery solving, and justice.

Later in the same book, Hermione moves beyond the superficial knowledge of book learning to demonstrate her intellect and to participate in a shared agency that challenges Harry’s predominance. For one, she serves as a foil to Harry’s best friend Ron. In the “underworld” below the attic, Ron illustrates the trait of strategy during the Wizard Chess battle, whereas Hermione reveals another aspect of intelligence when solving the potions’ riddle, that of logical deduction (SS 283-285). Hermione’s detection of the correct potion is essential to the quest. Although criticized by some for stepping aside to let Harry finish the mission, Hermione’s sacrifice is equal to Ron’s during the Wizard Chess battle. When she says that friendship and bravery are more important than “Books! And cleverness!” (SS 287), her modesty is no less than is Ron’s. Hermione not only exhibits her subjecthood, but also learns that in a well-working multiple agency,

some must stay back while others continue, as is typical in a hero-centered adventure. Similar to other fantasy stories where heroes form a triad, each sidekick contributes some quality that the main hero must eventually acquire, in this case, Ron's strategizing and Hermione's logic. In fact, Mimi Gladstein sees the triad as containing friendship partners, where Hermione is "an equal and essential member" (50) in contrast to other feminist readers who see Hermione as subordinate when "she . . . downplays [her] intellect" (Mayes-Elma 95) though this happens only in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. Looked at another way, Ron's supposed talent at strategy is overshadowed by Hermione, who more clearly illustrates the trait during the rest of the series when she continually plans ahead, anticipates potential consequences, and forms alternate plans. Perhaps a better contrast between each one's specialized knowledge is that Ron understands the history and background of the wizarding world while Hermione contributes her expertise in research, strategy, and logic.

Not a few feminist readers criticize Hermione's anti-feminist traits, although they admit to her agency and composure. One feminist reader who disapproves of Hermione as a mere enabler of male action in *The Sorcerer's Stone* does grant Hermione's agency when she works for the greater good beyond her immediate gain (Mayes-Elma 92). Mayes-Elma relegates Hermione to the helpmate or "rule-enforcer" and even castigates Hermione's rule breaking as supporting the patriarchy in the first novel (91). Nevertheless, Hermione's rule breaking is essential to the pursuit of justice in accordance with her sleuth role. Hermione's power to choose when to abide by or break the rules is a confirmation of her feminism within the genre: it is her space to act as however she determines according to the circumstances. Likewise criticizing Hermione, Melissa

Bradshaw admits that Hermione remains “composed” throughout the novels and gives the example of Hermione’s action in *The Sorcerer’s Stone* when she rescues the boys by casting a spell to open a locked door, preventing their school expulsion; on the other hand, Bradshaw chides the author for failing to credit Hermione’s capability after the event (“Hermione as Sacrificial Lamb”). Nonetheless, Hermione is not without commendation: she is thanked by the boys for rescuing them from the Devil’s Snare during the attic scene (SS 278), is recognized by Dumbledore at the end of *The Sorcerer’s Stone* for her “use of cool logic” (305), is praised by Professor Lupin for deducing he was a werewolf (PA 346), earns recognition of her “genius” from the boys in *The Deathly Hallows* (425) and is admired for her “brains” by her husband Ron in the Epilogue (DH 756). Generally, Hermione is so self-confident that she never appears to need any sort of praise. Moreover, most of these criticisms of Hermione, like many others, are justified in the first novel that sets up Hermione’s character change; however, it is a mistake to censure Hermione’s character without acknowledging that her growing confidence and competence in the later novels. In addition, her sleuth role even destabilizes the male fantasy adventure when she transgresses the boundaries between the two genres. When Bradshaw condemns the series as being popular with girls “because they sympathize with Hermione and her oppressed situation” (“The Sacrificial Lamb in Harry Potter”), the critic too quickly dismisses the strength of Hermione’s character, diminishes her finer girl sleuth qualities, and fails to acknowledge that Hermione exhibits many feminist ideals within her own space in the sleuth genre. That Hermione’s actions tend to support the patriarchy is predetermined by the sleuth formula that requires the hero to return the

world to stability, an ending that is equally essential to the plot of the fantasy adventure hero.

For readers sympathetic to feminism's more progressive goals, the diminishment of attention on Hermione can signify her suppression. The stronger Hermione gets in the series, the less predominant her character. Some critics, like Bradshaw, may be disturbed that Hermione's role is sacrificed for marketability ("The Sacrificial Lamb in Harry Potter"). Similarly, readers may justly affirm that Hermione's own adventures often end poorly, are inconsequential, or succeed against female, rather than male villains. Rather than see these as flaws however, readers must realize that Hermione's role diminishes whenever the fantasy genre supplants the sleuth genre, thus returning her to the intelligent female helper at times where her choices are constricted and her complete agency is inhibited although she continues developing her attributes as a smart sleuth.

Still other readers will approve of Hermione, like Nancy, who is the feminist in popular culture (Craig and Cadogan 163). Along the way, Hermione certainly fulfills some feminist aspects of the Nancy Drew sleuth who, as MacLeod points out, wants to be taken seriously, to earn credit for accomplishments, and to be accepted without restraints, prejudice, or any limitations of her gender (450). Whatever way a reader wants to see Hermione as either a sidekick or a competing hero, Hermione's double role in the Potter series is facilitated by the formulas of fiction that permit readers to explore their own "self definition" (Tompkins xvi) as the hero in each genre.

Whenever Hermione works for the benefit of others however, she undercuts her Nancy Drew role to further engage feminist principles. Whereas Nancy rarely helps change people's minds and tends to seek justice for single individuals, mostly of good

families or of a high social standing (Parry 145-156), Hermione engages in social activism to pursue the goals of supporting truth in journalism and for the political goal of abolishing of elf slavery. In these ways, her agency carries the conscience of feminism in correcting injustice and in subverting dominant values within the wizarding world to match feminism's more humanistic values. Further unlike Nancy Drew, who stays frozen in her role of young girl detective, Hermione grows chronologically during the series, much to the author's credit, and even matures to plan ahead for a future occupation in which she can do something worthwhile for others (*OP* 228), an intention in accord with feminism. Thus, in transcending her Nancy Drew role, whether as a romance heroine or a social reformer, Hermione continually interferes with Harry's position as the central male hero.

The intermingling of the two genres not only provides tension between the two heroes, but also results in a mix of non-gendered clues. The commonplace objects such as the trap door in Hogwart's attic, the Vanishing Cabinet with a hidden compartment, the unknown door in the Chamber of Secrets, and The Marauder's Map all link the sleuth and adventure genres; nonetheless, other clues are more gender neutral than those in the Nancy Drew series. While Nancy's clues are typically quaint, feminine, or sentimental objects, such as ballet slippers or pieces of jewelry (Craig and Cadogan 155), the clues in the Potter series are not gender linked. For example, Hermione is not squeamish about spiders or the petrified cat, and Harry decodes Voldemort's diary *The Chamber of Secrets* and even retrieves the clue of the locket in *The Half-Blood Prince*.

More certainly in inserting the girl sleuth in the Harry Potter series, the writer ran into an invisible barrier in developing Hermione. There are few models of girl sleuths

who follow feminist alternatives. Even the newer female adult detective genre is still in search of protagonists who transcend male domination and sexism (Klein 221). Although the author may have tried to counterbalance the focus on the male hero, if she strengthened Hermione's position too far, the violation of the conventions would construct a completely different kind of text. In short, the competition between the sleuth role in the realistic mode and the hero role in the fantasy adventure suggests that both genres co-exist uneasily between their fluctuating boundaries in the Harry Potter series.

In the end, Hermione proves her growth into a keen detective much like Nancy Drew. With increasing facility, Hermione has detected clues, unraveled riddles, solved mysteries, and uncovered suspects and their motives. She asserts her own subjecthood when she changes from rule-enforcer to rule-breaker. Her agency expands from assertiveness, forthright speech, and leadership into forceful action for justice. Changing from companion to co-conspirator and co-leader, Hermione develops into the sleuth who breaks the rules to do whatever must be done for a higher cause. She is more thoughtful and strategic than Ron, and more perceptive, logical, wise, and cool-headed than Harry. Readers who concentrate only on *The Sorcerer's Stone* may well complain that Hermione is submissive to the patriarchal hegemony, but those who read further in the series will witness that because of her take-charge personality she often shares agency with Harry or pursues her own sleuth adventures. Like Nancy Drew, Hermione Granger claims her own feminist space as the girl sleuth of intelligence and action within the parameters of formula fiction that requires the happy ending of restoring justice and order to society.

Works Cited

- Bishop, Wendy and Hans Ostrom. "Introduction." *Genre and Writing: Issues, Argument, Alternatives*. Ed. Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom. Boynton/Cook: Portsmouth, NH, 1997: ix-xv.
- Bradshaw, Melissa. "The Sacrificial Lamb in Harry Potter: A Glance through the Lens of Feminist Theory." Schreiner University, Kerrville TX. N. pag. 19 July 2007. <<http://organizations.weber.edu/metaphor/OldSite/metaphor2004online/pg083.html>>.
- Caprio, Betsy. *Girl Sleuth on the Couch: The Mystery of Nancy Drew*. Trabuco Canyon, CA: Source Books, 1992.
- Craig, Patricia and Mary Cadogan. *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction*. NY: St. Martin's P, 1981.
- Eagleton, Mary. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. 1986. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993.
- Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "Introduction." *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*. Ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. Urbana, U of Illinois P, 1995: 1-20.
- Gladstein, Mimi R. "Feminism and Equal Opportunity: Hermione and the Women of Hogwarts." *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*. Ed. David Bagget and Shawn E. Klein. Chicago: Open Court, 2004: 49-59.
- Heilman, Elizabeth E. "Blue Wizards and Pink Witches." *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003: 221-239.
- Heilman, Elizabeth E. and Anne E. Gregory. "Images of the Privileged Insider and Outcast Outsider." *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*.

- New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003: 241-259.
- Klein, Kathleen Gregory. *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre*. Second Edition.
Urbana: U of Illinois P: 1995.
- Kinsale, Laura. "The Androgynous Reader." *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*.
Ed. Jayne Anne Krenz. Philadelphia, U of Pennsylvania P, 1992.
- MacLeod, Anne Scott. "Nancy Drew and Her Rivals: No Contest." *Horn Book* 63 (1987):
422-450.
- MacDonald, Janice. "Parody and Detective Fiction." *Theory and Practice of Classic
Detective Fiction*. Ed. Jerome Delamater and Ruth Progozy. Contributions to the
Study of Popular Culture, 62. Westport: Greenwood P, 1997: 61-71.
- Mayes-Elma, Ruthann. *Females and Harry Potter: Not All That Empowering*. Lanham:
Rowman and Littlefield, 2006. 8 April 2007 < [http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd/send-
pdf.cgi?acc_num=miami1060025232](http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd/send-pdf.cgi?acc_num=miami1060025232).
- Modleski, Tania. *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*.
Hamden: Archon, 1982.
- Parry, Sally E. "The Secret of the Feminist Heroine: The Search for Values in Nancy
Drew and Judy Bolton." *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender; and Girls'
Series*. Ed. Sherrie A. Inness. Bowling Green, OH, Bowling Green State
University Popular Press, 1997: 145-158.
- Rowling, J[oanne] K[athleen]. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. New York:
Levine-Scholastic, 1999.
- . *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. New York: Levine-Scholastic, 2007.
- . *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. New York: Levine-Scholastic, 2000.

- . *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. New York: Levine-Scholastic, 2005.
- . *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. New York: Levine-Scholastic, 2003.
- . *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. New York: Levine-Scholastic, 1999.
- . *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Levine-Scholastic, 1997.

Tompkins, Jane. "Introduction: The Cultural Work of American Fiction." *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. By Jane Tompkins. NY: Oxford UP, 1985: xi-xix.

Warhol, Robyn R. and Diane Price Herndl. "About Feminism." *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. NJ: Rutgers, 1991: ix-xvi.