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## Glass Slippers, Fairy Dust, and Feminist Ethics: Perrault and Barrie's Influence on J.K. Rowling's Independent Heroine

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Glass Slippers, Fairy Dust, and Feminist Ethics: Perrault and Barrie's Influence on J.K.

### Rowling's Independent Heroine

Within the past decade, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has cemented itself as a staple of Children's and Young Adult Literature. Though mainly focused on "The Boy Who Lived", the female character of the trio draws the reader's eye. Throughout the series, Hermione Granger proves herself to be an invaluable member of the trio. In the series finale, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Hermione's value is most clear. In this conclusion, Hermione displays that it is completely possible to be a strong, independent woman, while still conforming to some of society's gender stereotypes.

This stance on feminism is evident through Rowling's characterization of Hermione, as well as the more stereotypical female traits, clearly taken from classic children's tales. Although Hermione is a character of her own, she is a hybrid of Rowling's feminist tendencies and her knowledge of classic fairy tale characters, such as Cinderella and Wendy Darling. In this essay, I will focus on J.K. Rowling's characterization of Hermione Granger as not only feminist, but also as a modern, feminist version of Perrault's Cinderella and Barrie's Wendy Darling. Hermione's transformation from muggle-born to savior of the Wizarding World and her role of mother to Harry and Ron throughout their journey mimics the stories of Cinderella and Wendy.

There is little to no debate on Rowling's knowledge of classic fairy tale characters. According to her official website, Rowling attended Exeter University where, "she earned a

French and Classics degree, her course including one year in Paris” (Rowling, “Biography”). A degree in Classic Literature, would require at least minimal knowledge on Children’s Literature. Rowling even takes the opportunity to reference *Cinderella* in *Deathly Hallows* during an exchange between Ron and Hermione. Hermione is describing the types of stories she was told as a child when she exclaims, “Ron, you know full well Harry and I were brought up by Muggles! We didn’t hear stories like that when we were little, we heard *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* and *Cinderella*.”(Rowling 135). A simple reference to the famous fairy tale details Rowling’s familiarity with Perrault’s classic story. Barrie’s influence on Rowling is not as clearly stated as Perrault’s. There is no direct reference to Wendy (or any *Peter Pan* character) however; her knowledge of classic literature alludes to her awareness of the “Angel of the House” archetype. The “Angel of the House” is a character that is quite common in nineteenth century literature, including in *Peter Pan* with Wendy.

### **Hermione and Feminism**

Feminism is defined as the movement for political, economic, and social equality amongst the sexes. As stated previously, J.K. Rowling’s stance on feminism is evident through Hermione. Hermione shows throughout the novel that she will not fall back to anyone. By taking on leadership roles within the trio and other friends and family, she displays a strength that rivals any of her peers, regardless of gender. In her article, ““I’m Hoping to Do Some Good in the World”: Hermione Granger and Feminist Ethics”, Atje Gercama states that a feminist must be displaying ethics of care. Gercama explains:

First of all, ethics of care pay attention to context: in different situations, people might have different needs. A second characteristic of ethics of care is the

primacy of relationships. Each person has their own particular needs, and recognizing and acting upon these needs is an important part of feminist ethics of care...Finally, actual *caring* for people is a key element of an ethics of care”(41).

Hermione meets each of these criteria over her journey with Harry and Ron.

Hermione’s care regarding context of the situation is on display in a number of situations, but most prevalently so in the chapter entitled “The Thief”. In the beginning of this chapter, Harry, Ron, and Hermione have just escaped the Ministry of Magic and found refuge in the woods. Hermione’s care to the situation arises when she realizes that Ron has been splinched in the process of apparating. Without much thought, she rushes into action and produces a potion that she had previously packed in case a situation of the sort arose. Rowling chronicles

Hermione’s diligence:

...Her fingers already busy at Ron’s sleeve, where the blood was wettest and darkest...she tore open Ron’s shirt...His insides crawled unpleasantly as Hermione laid bare Ron’s upper arm, where a great chunk of flesh was missing...Hermione took [the bottle] and poured three drops of the potion onto the bleeding wound....(269-70).

In this situation, Hermione had a limited amount of time to get her friend help. Had she not been previously prepared, Ron’s life would have been in a precarious situation. Hermione met Ron’s needs by being prepared for such a situation, thus fulfilling Gercama’s first criterion.

Gercama’s second criterion is caring on the basis of the other individual’s need, not the context of the situation. Hermione proves herself in this area as well in the chapter, “Godric’s Hollow”. In this chapter, Harry and Hermione travel to Harry’s birthplace, Godric’s Hollow. While walking through the town cemetery, the duo searches for the tombs of Harry’s parents.

When they are found, Harry's emotions build and he is unable to fight back the tears. Aware that he is upset of the fact that he has nothing to leave for his parents, Hermione, "raised her wand, moved it in a circle through the air, and a wreath of Christmas roses blossomed before them"(329). Hermione's relationship with Harry allowed her to know when her friend was in need of emotional support. Lacking a gift to his deceased parents, Hermione knew that the correct response was to conjure a gift on the spot. Her care for her friend's emotions helps fulfill Gercama's second criterion.

Gercama's third criterion must be actual care for other people. Hermione shows pure concern for the well being of her friends in the chapter entitled, "The Fallen Warrior". In this chapter, each of the seven Potters are returning to the Burrow after being ambushed by Death Eaters. Hermione is one of the first to arrive and worries when Ron has not returned. When he finally arrives, Hermione shows her elation. Rowling writes, "It's them!' screamed Hermione...Hermione flew at [Ron] and hugged him tightly"(76). By ensuring that her friends and family were emotionally and physically well, Hermione has achieved all three characteristics that Gercama claims are held by feminists.

Within the same article, Gercama states that there is debate as to whether or not Hermione could be classified as a feminist character. Debate originating from the idea that the Wizarding World is not an inherently gender divided society. Gercama states:

Work-wise, women hold positions that come with a lot of esteem. At the Ministry of Magic, for example, Dolores Umbridge holds a very high position as Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic. There are female Aurors...there are a lot of women in the Wizengamot, and they are held in high esteem...At Hogwarts, at least two of the Heads of House are women...Furthermore, the number one

magical sport, Quidditch, is mixed... With equality of men and women being such an important of feminism, to what extent can Hermione still be called a feminist? (38).

Although there seems to be general equality in the Wizarding World, there is still no debate that Hermione could be classified as a feminist. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Hermione begins her mission to have equality amongst wizards and house-elves. She takes her time to start a group called S.P.E.W (Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare), in which she proves that she believes in equal rights for all, regardless of species or gender. In her article, “Hermione Granger Goes to War: A Feminist Reflection on Girls in Conflict”, Helen Berents makes the same claim when she states, “Hermione’s willingness and ability to defend both herself and others (such as house elves) increases through the books and demonstrates her growing independence and agency”(49). The lack of gender inequality in the Wizarding World does not equate a lack of feminism.

Numerous scholars have described Hermione’s feminism as “Third Wave Feminism”. Third Wave Feminism is defined as the feminist movement that restarted towards the beginning of the 1990s and towards the present. In her article, “Unstoppable Force: Maternal Power and Feminism”, Alexandra Hidalgo claims Hermione’s Third Wave Feminism when she states, “Women still face the arduous task of balancing motherhood and their professional commitments...Hermione, who I will claim is a Third Wave Feminist, performs maternal function toward Harry, while excelling in her ‘professional’ life, that of student, rebel witch, and Horcrux Hunter”(67). Hermione’s maternal instincts will be covered later in the essay, but it is clear that maternal instinct and feminism are not exclusive categories. Hermione proves this by

fighting for equal rights amongst the sexes (and other magical creatures) and maintaining a family life as well.

Hermione's feminism is not a topic that calls for much debating, as it is quite evident. Lana Whited's book, *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, states, "Rowling seems to have successfully developed an emerging adolescent who appears armed to withstand the most dangerous gender related pitfall and not retreat into silence, intimidated by the masculine world" (229). There is no worry in the kind of person that Hermione is developing into. She is sure of herself and her abilities, so she shows no signs of intimidation towards the male sex. However, other of Hermione's characteristics are cause for questioning. Many of Hermione's qualities and actions mirror those of classic fairy tale characters, Cinderella and Wendy Darling. Throughout the next two sections, I will be delving into the similarities between Hermione Granger and the characters made famous by Charles Perrault and J.M. Barrie, respectively.

### **Hermione and Cinderella**

Charles Perrault's *Cinderella* is a tale that has been re-imagined in many different ways. It is the classic story of a young girl that comes from lonely, dire conditions and transforms into a princess. While Hermione does not become royalty by the end of *Deathly Hallows*, she does become a person of elevated status. This reason, among many others, is why I believe Hermione is a retelling of the timeless Cinderella story.

In his article, "Breaking the Glass Slipper: Changing Cultural Norms and the Cinderella Story", Justin Platt claims that each Cinderella story begins with the same elements. He states, "Cinderella comes from an ideal family situation, filled with loving parents, respect, and wealth, in short, everything a young girl could ask for. Then disaster strikes"(35). The lack of parents is

an issue that both heroines face, Cinderella initially losing her mother then her father through is lack of involvement, and Hermione losing them both at once. Hermione is raised in a normal, loving household, however when the threat of Voldemort becomes too grand, she takes matters into her own hands and orphans herself by casting a loss of memory charm on her parents. By charming her parents into believing they have no daughter, and sending them to Australia, Hermione has left herself with no immediate family, but has protected her loved ones in the process. From this moment on, she is in the same position as Cinderella.

Hermione taking charge of her situation is what differentiates both characters. Cinderella did not have a choice when she lost her mother, however her father was not deceased. He lived in the same household as she did, but was under the influence of his new wife. Cinderella could have taken charge in that situation by demanding that her father stand up to his wife, though she did not. Because of her passivity, Cinderella is left to suffer until somebody comes to her rescue. Had Hermione not taken action, she would not have been the one to suffer. In this role reversal, Hermione had to orphan herself in order for her parents to evade the suffering that would be placed upon them by Lord Voldemort and his minions.

In his book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Bruno Bettelheim states, "While fairy tales invariably point the way to a better future, they concentrate on the process of change, rather than describing the exact details of the bliss eventually to be gained"(73). Bettelheim claims that fairy tales focus on the transformation process rather than telling the reader directly what will be gained at the end of the tale. This is the case with both Cinderella and Hermione. Cinderella's story is mostly famous for the transformation process from normal girl to servant to princess. As stated previously, Hermione does not become a princess by the end of the novel, but she does become a person of elevated



status. Hermione begins *Deathly Hallows* as an outcast of sorts. She is unable to stay home because she no longer has parents, yet she cannot return to Hogwarts because of the new regulations that are in place against muggle-borns. Her transformation process begins with her acceptance of going on the journey to find and destroy the horcruxes with Harry and Ron. Her role in the beginning of the novel is that of orphaned, muggle-born with no place to go. By the end of the novel, she is heralded a hero by all for being one of the people who destroyed a horcrux and brought down Lord Voldemort. In an interview with Rowling, we are told that Hermione goes on to work in the legal department of the Ministry of Magic, only elevating her status further.

Hermione and Cinderella's transformation processes are different because of one main reason, magical intervention. Cinderella's process was easier to complete because of the intervention of her fairy godmother. Her fairy godmother shows up before the ball and gifts her a pass to the ball. Although Hermione also has magic readily available, she does not have the power to make all of her problems disappear at the flick of a wand. She must use her magic to solve each problem as it appears.

One of the problems that Hermione must face in the novel is the ultimate realization that her love for Ron runs deeper than friendship. Cinderella knows from the moment she sees her Prince Charming that she loves him. The relationship between Ron and Hermione and Prince Charming and Cinderella mimic each other, however the roles are slightly reversed. Cinderella needs the Prince to save her from her parents, but Hermione is the one that saves Ron from his own self-doubt. It is clear that Ron loves Hermione in the same way that she loves him, but he is not sure of it until the moment she takes it upon herself to confirm her feelings for him. In the chapter entitled, "The Battle of Hogwarts", Ron brings up the fact that they have not released the

house elves from the kitchen. He believes that it would be immoral to command the house elves to fight in the battle. At this moment, Hermione, “[ran] at Ron, she flung [her arms] around his neck and kissed him full on the mouth. Ron threw away the fangs and broomstick he was holding and responded with such enthusiasm that he lifted Hermione off her feet”(625). Realizing that Ron was as serious about the safety of the house elves as she was, Hermione felt that this was the moment that she was waiting for. By acting on her feelings, Hermione “saves” Ron from his self-doubt about their relationship status. As Platt suggests, “Perrault’s Cinderella lacks any agency or independent thought, her relationship with the prince blossoms and she gracefully rejoins the upper-class, this time with a royal title”(41). Cinderella has little to do with the initiation of her relationship with Prince Charming, yet Hermione initiates her romantic relationship with Ron.

The stories of Cinderella and Hermione echo each other in a number of ways. The differences in the stories tend to stay within the reasoning that Hermione is more of an independent character. She takes what she needs and does what she needs to do in order to achieve her goals. While their stories are similar, their character traits do not match up as much. Character traits wise, Hermione has much more in common with *Peter Pan’s* Wendy Darling.

### **Hermione and Wendy Darling**

There are three characteristics that people think of when thinking of Wendy Darling: mother, storyteller, and protector. Those are her three main roles in J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. Hermione possesses each of these characteristics, which makes one believe that the *Peter Pan* heroine inspired Rowling.

Wendy does not become an actual mother until years after her adventures in Neverland with Peter. However, in her time in Neverland, she became a surrogate mother to the Lost Boys,

her brothers (Michael and John), and to Peter himself. While traveling with Harry and Ron, Hermione also becomes a surrogate mother. Her duties involve packing for the journey, cooking for them while camping, and making sure each person takes a turn in wearing the horcrux around their neck.

In her article, “Unstoppable Force: Maternal Power and Feminism”, Alexandra Hidalgo makes the case for Hermione’s maternal instinct when she states:

“In spite of her brilliance, Hermione’s most important mothering support is not intellectual but emotional. Observant and intuitive like an effective mother, she knows the secrets Harry is trying to hide...Because she knows Harry so well, Hermione is able to provide him with the advice and support he needs to hear at particularly trying times”(83).

Hidalgo claims that Hermione’s maternal instinct is what makes her friendship with Harry as strong as it is. This is most evident in *Deathly Hallows* because of the lack of adult supervision throughout the novel. Even Ron, who is used to having a mother around, comes to adopt Hermione as a mother figure.

While Hermione does accept this mother figure role, she does not accept the criticism that comes with it. In the chapter entitled, “The Thief”, the trio find themselves in the woods with no food except for the bits they can scrounge up. Hermione does her best in cooking the wild mushrooms that she finds but they are not received well with Ron, “[pushing] his portion away, looking queasy; [and] Harry [preserving his] only so as not to hurt Hermione’s feelings”(277). In the next chapter entitled, “The Goblin’s Revenge”, Hermione stands up for herself when Ron criticizes her cooking:

‘Well don’t bother increasing this, it’s disgusting’ said Ron.

‘Harry caught the fish and I did my best with it! I notice I’m always the one who ends up sorting out the food, because I’m a *girl*, I suppose!’

...Hermione jumped up and bits of roast pike slid off her tin plate onto the floor.

‘*You* can do the cooking tomorrow, Ron, *you* can find the ingredients and try and charm them into something worth eating, and I’ll sit here and pull faces and moan and you can see how you-’ (293).

Despite conforming to the traditionally female role of cook, Hermione was not willing to take the unfounded criticism from Ron. Katrin Berndt acknowledges Hermione’s confidence when she states, “Hermione appears to have made the transition from childhood to adolescence to maturity without losing confidence in herself; she in fact gains further belief in her abilities”(168). Her confidence allows her to stand up for herself when her work is being belittled. If she had no confidence, she would not feel comfortable enough to talk about the food issue with Ron and would most likely subject herself to the entire process again the next day.

Wendy did not fight much (or at all) with Peter about household responsibilities. She was very accepting of the “Angel of the House” role. The most she ever did to defy Peter was decide that she wanted to go back home to London. Although he was upset, he ultimately agreed to the move back home, even allowing the Lost Boys to move back with her. While still in Neverland, however, one of Wendy’s responsibilities was that of storyteller. As a storyteller to her brothers while in London, Peter wanted her to come to Neverland to do the same with him and the Lost Boys.

Hermione’s role as storyteller is not on as grand of a scale as Wendy’s was. Even so, she finds herself reading stories to her own pair of Lost Boys. All the same, her role as storyteller is still important to the story. In the chapter entitled, “The Will of Albus Dumbledore”, the Minister

of Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour arrives at the Burrow to give Harry, Ron and Hermione the items that Professor Dumbledore left for them in his will. For Hermione, Dumbledore bequeathed his copy of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. While this is a seemingly innocent gift, the entire book is written in Ancient Runes, a language that only Hermione can read. Dumbledore writes, “To Miss Hermione Jean Granger, I leave my copy of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, in the hope that she will find it entertaining and instructional”(126). Dumbledore’s gift to Hermione was deliberate seeing as the book told the story of the Three Brothers, which turns out was of great importance to Harry. Without that particular story, he would not have been aware of the Deathly Hallows, which gave him another option in the ultimate defeat of Lord Voldemort.

In her article, “*Books! And Cleverness: Hermione’s Wits*”, Tara Foster, writes about the aforementioned scene. She states:

The object bequeathed, the book, underscores the importance of her studies, and the word ‘instructive’ highlights her wits, her interaction with the texts. She tells Rufus Scrimgeour, ‘If the Ministry hasn’t found any hidden codes in this book in thirty-one days, I doubt I will’, but she does indeed find a message there, outwitting all of the Ministry officials who had already examined the book with painstaking care. (119)

This excerpt from the novel not only showcases how Hermione’s wits are important to the novel as a whole, it also explains why it was essential that Hermione be assigned the storyteller role. She was the most serious concerning her studies at Hogwarts, so it is plausible that she is the only one of the trio who could translate Ancient Runes.

While Wendy’s role of storyteller was bigger than Hermione’s, the latter has a much bigger role in the form of protector. Although Wendy attempted to protect her brothers from the

dangerous Neverland held, she spent her time in Neverland usually being one of the victims in Tinkerbell's scheme to keep Peter's attention. Hermione spent almost the entire journey through the numerous forests completing enchantments in order to keep the trio safe from outsiders. In the chapter entitled, "The Thief", Harry, Ron, and Hermione are forced to begin hiding in forests. When she sees that this is their only option, she notes, "If we're staying, we should put some protective enchantments around the place'...and raising her wand, she began to walk in a wide circle around Harry and Ron, murmuring incantations as she went...It was as if Hermione had cast a heat haze upon their clearing"(272). Placing the enchantments around the trio's camp was her way of keeping them physically safe. There were also times where she attempted to keep them safe from emotional damage.

In the chapter entitled, "The Elder Wand", the trio has just witnessed the death of Fred Weasley. Overcome with grief, Ron angrily decides that he is going into the battle once more to kill Death Eaters. In order to keep him from going on a murderous rampage, Hermione reminds him of the reason they are there. Rowling writes, "We *will* fight... We'll have to, to reach the snake! But let's not lose sight now of what we're supposed to be d-doing...' She was crying too, and she wiped her face on her tunic and singed sleeve as she spoke, but she took great heaving breaths to calm herself, still keeping a tight hold on Ron..."(640). Despite the fact that Hermione was also mourning the loss of a close friend, she maintained her composure in order to keep Ron from committing murder. If she had allowed him to continue fighting, he could later have had a tough time living with himself knowing of the actions he committed in a time of grief.

It is clear to see the similarities between Hermione and Wendy because of their mother, storyteller, and protector roles. Although they each achieve these titles, they do it in their own way. Wendy does so in a more passive manner. She accepts the roles that Peter and the Lost

Boys impose on her, and she does so with a smiling face. Hermione also accepts the roles, but is not afraid to let Harry and Ron know when they are overstepping their boundaries.

In her book, *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*, Roberta Seelinger Trites claims:

These characters, then, all take an active part in their own redemption. No knight in shining armor comes to save them; if anything, they save the knight. These female characters gain their strength by rejecting stereotypical expectations that girls must be submissive and by exploring their own choices. And in their decision-making, each of them confronts a central truth about her gender: being female can give her strength (24).

Although not all of Trites' statement can be said for Wendy Darling, all of it can be used towards the description of Hermione's character. There is no instance in *Deathly Hallows* where Hermione believes that she must somehow conform to society's gender roles in order to make good grades, gain Ron Weasley's love, or even defeat Lord Voldemort. As a feminist character, Hermione does what she believes is right for her and does whatever she believes is going to lead her to achieve her goals.

Hermione Granger's feminist characterization by J.K. Rowling is one that has given young girls everywhere the belief that they could do anything they set their mind to. Hermione does not have limitations set to her by others or herself. She has broken down barriers for young girls with her and after her. By classifying Hermione as a feminist, J.K. Rowling has begun the process in changing society's perception that feminism is a bad word. Girls today have less of a battle with themselves to identify as feminist; I believe this stems from Hermione Granger's influence.

As a Cinderella character, Hermione did all that Perrault's Cinderella did, but with more force. She did not wait for evil forces to come and torture her family. She did not wait for a fairy godmother to come help her transform for battle. She did not wait for Prince Charming to save her. Hermione took it upon herself to make sure her parents were not disturbed by sending them away with no memory of a daughter. She became her own fairy godmother and taught herself all that was needed in order to be victorious in battle. She saved her Prince Charming and initiated their romance. She completed everything that Cinderella was able to, but with little to no help outside from herself.

As a Wendy Darling character, Hermione possessed many of the same titles as Peter Pan's heroine. She was a mother figure to Harry and Ron while on the road, but never in a subservient manner. She was a storyteller to the boys, main reason being that she held the ability of reading Ancient Runes when they did not. She was a protector for Harry and Ron. She shielded them physically and mentally whenever it was a possibility for her. As with Cinderella, she has every aspect Wendy has, but on a higher level.

The character of Hermione Granger is one that will be remembered with nothing but positive statements. Strong willed, intelligent, and even humorous at times, she helps readers understand that there is nothing wrong with wanting to be the smartest girl in the room if that is what you want to be. The story of Hermione is a modern version to the Cinderella tale we have all become accustomed to. Coming from relative outcast to savior of the Wizarding World, it is a true story of independent transformation that we could all learn from. After all, is there much else to be expected from the "brightest witch of her age"?



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