

A Postscript to Heteronormative Heroism and Queering the School Story in JK Rowling's Harry Potter Series.

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Children's Literature Association Quarterly

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 33, Number 2, Summer 2008

pp. 188-192

10.1353/chq.0.0009

ARTICLE

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

A Postscript to "Heteronormative Heroism and Queering the School Story in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series"

Tison Pugh (bio) and David L. Wallace (bio)

"My truthful answer to you . . . I always thought of Dumbledore as gay," proclaimed J. K. Rowling in a conversation with her fans, who greeted this surprising announcement with thunderous applause.¹ But what are the interpretive implications of Rowling's announcement of Dumbledore's homosexuality only after she concluded her *Harry Potter* series? As Catherine Tosenberger's contribution to this forum indicates, Potter fans who participate in "slash" fanfiction sites were busy searching for hints of queerness in Dumbledore and other characters long before Rowling's announcement. Indeed, our own published work on the *Harry Potter* series suggested that a number of queer figurations could be drawn from the series, even if these ephemeral traces would not lead many fans to draw conclusions about Dumbledore's sexual orientation. Rowling's "outing" of Dumbledore, as well as the publication of the final book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, offers us the opportunity to reconsider the arguments of our previously published essay "Heteronormative Heroism and Queering the School Story in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series." In this postscript to that essay, we turn first to the issues of gender, sexuality, and the development of Harry's manhood that we raised previously to explore the continued operation of heteronormativity in the books; we then take up the fascinating question of how Rowling's declaration of Dumbledore's homosexuality outside the pages of her text might influence new interpretations of the *Potter* books.

As the capstone to the *Harry Potter* series, *Deathly Hallows* follows the pattern of the first six books by introducing a new concept—the Deathly Hallows—to be explored and resolved in the narrative, but it also builds masterfully on the [End Page 188] myriad plot devices sown in the six previous books to serve as a satisfying culmination of the series. *Deathly Hallows* differs from the previous six books in that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry does not serve as the primary setting, and so this installment of the *Potter* epic does not itself constitute a school story; instead, in the final book of the series we see Harry acting largely

outside the aegis of any of the institutions critical to the previous books (that is, Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic, and the Order of the Phoenix). Thus, *Deathly Hallows* completes Harry's journey to manhood, with the novel beginning as its protagonist turns seventeen—the official coming-of-age year for witches and wizards. In this regard, the critical question that the series ultimately asks is, what kind of man does Harry become?

Harry does not metamorphose into the typical incarnation of an alpha-male, solitary action hero, as the trajectory of his character in the first six books suggested he might. Instead, Harry's partnership with his friends Ron and Hermione is renewed in the quest for horcruxes, and the test of Harry's manhood becomes largely Christ-like in the need for him to resist the temptation to power inherent in the Deathly Hallows and in his willingness to surrender his own life for the greater good. Despite this somewhat expanded view of masculine heroism, stereotypical and constricting depictions of female agency and diverse sexualities—similar to those apparent in the first six books—nevertheless continue to lionize Harry's masculinity as dominant.

Hermione's role in helping Harry to resist the temptation of the Deathly Hallows and to adhere to the horcrux quest is central to the seventh novel's plot, yet our criticisms of the secondary nature of the female characters still bears merit as no significant interruptions disturb the basic pattern of male leadership. Certainly, women play important roles in the climactic final battle: except for Harry's final confrontation with Voldemort, the most satisfying duel occurs between Bellatrix Lestrange and Molly Weasley, who breaks out of her usual role of tending to the home front and knitting sweaters to kill her murderous adversary while shouting an utterly satisfying expletive. Minerva McGonagall also plays an important role in the defense of...

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Tison Pugh is an associate professor in the Department of English at the University of Central Florida. He is the author of *Queering Medieval Genres* and *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature*, as well as articles on children’s literature in such journals as *The Lion and the Unicorn* and *Children’s Literature*.

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