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“You have to mean it.”: Spell Casting, Intent, and Consent in the Harry Potter Series

Throughout the Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling makes it very clear that passion and determination are major factors in spell casting. If a witch or wizard casts a spell and the motivation for the success of that spell is not present, it will often either not work or be a faulty incantation. As Bellatrix says to Harry when he tries to curse her, “You need to mean them...you need to really want to cause pain” (OotP 810). One practical application of this idea in the series is the concept of wand loyalty and how a wizard may gain the allegiance of another’s wand. This concept really comes into play in *Deathly Hallows* when the loyalty of the Elder Wand is being contested. We see how the Elder Wand changed its allegiance from Dumbledore to Draco to Harry, and readers can get a glimpse into how a wand’s loyalty may change. At first, it seems like you need to disarm someone and, just like magic, their wand will become yours. However, a wizard does not always gain a wand’s allegiance simply by disarming them. So what determines when a wand’s loyalty may change? It is my belief that the intent behind the disarming of the wizard is a major factor in determining whether or not you will gain the loyalty of their wand. In order to take a wand’s allegiance, a spell must be cast with the intent to make someone vulnerable and the wizard being attacked has not given their consent to lose their wand.

Wand loyalty is something that is introduced early on in the series. In *Sorcerer’s Stone*, Ollivander makes the idea that “the wand chooses the wizard” very clear (SS 82) By having Harry try out various wands until he finds one that “fits” well, it’s introducing very early on in the series the idea that wizards and their wands have a very personal connection and that this connection between a wand and a wizard only works with the wand that chose the wizard. He says that Harry “will never get such good results with another wizard’s wand”

(SS 84). Essentially, this shows that the wand has chosen to be loyal to that wizard alone. And this idea that a wizard and his wand have a connection is kept throughout the series.

However, we do also see how a wand's loyalty can change in certain circumstances. The Elder Wand is the best example of how this concept works. In the span of a little over a book we see the wand change its allegiance from Dumbledore to Draco and finally to Harry. The way they won the wand was because they overpowered the wizard who currently owned it. Dumbledore bested Grindlewald in 1945 and became the wand's master (SS 103). Draco then won it from Dumbledore by making him vulnerable, for Dumbledore even says to Draco that he has made him "more defenseless than you can have dreamed" (HBP 590). So Draco won the Elder Wand by taking Dumbledore's power and making him defenseless by using *expelliarmus* to rid him of his wand.

Harry, however, won the wand differently. In the scene in Malfoy Manor, Harry physically overpowers Draco and takes the wand from him, and in doing so he becomes the master of the Elder Wand. But, he did not gain the wand by magically disarming Draco. Rather, he more or less assaulted him, physically took his wand from him, and left him defenseless. Though it is interesting to note that the wand that Harry wrestled from Draco was *not* the Elder Wand. However, Harry still was able to overpower Draco and make him vulnerable and powerless, so the wand that was loyal to Draco then became loyal to Harry. In addition, Harry gained the loyalty of all the wands that were loyal to Draco, whether or not Draco was in possession of them at the time.

What we see here are the two different ways that a wizard may win a wand from another. By either magically rendering their opponent vulnerable or by physically overpowering them, a wizard has a strong chance of winning the allegiance of their opponent's wand. In short, at this point one can infer that the way to win the allegiance of another's wand is simply by disarming and overpowering them. But what drives a wand to recognize a new master? And why aren't wands constantly changing hands from wizard to wizard, for we often see characters get disarmed throughout the course of the series. In most cases though, the wizard that gets disarmed does not lose the ownership of their wand.

In *Order of the Phoenix*, for example, we see the members of Dumbledore's Army attempting to disarm their fellow students. It's the first thing that Harry teaches them, despite the comments that say that it is a useless spell. The students pair up and take turns disarming each other, but at the end of the lesson, everyone still retains the ownership of their wand. We can safely assume that everyone's wand remained loyal to them because we see no instances of anyone's wand acting differently after that. The difference between this scenario versus Draco or Harry gaining the Elder Wand is the intent behind casting the spells. No one in Dumbledore's Army is disarming their fellow student with the intent of overpowering them. What they are attempting to do is disarm their fellow student so that they further their education. The intent is not harm to another person, but rather to put themselves at an academic advantage.

Another example of wands physically changing hand but allegiances remaining intact can be seen in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, in the scene in the Shrieking Shack where Sirius finally confronts the trio. Wands change hands and characters get disarmed rapidly in this scene and it's difficult to keep track of which character is holding what wand. However, we know that Sirius disarms Harry and Hermione, Harry and Hermione physically fight to regain their wands, Remus disarms Harry and Hermione also, and Harry, Ron, and Hermione all simultaneously attempt to disarm Snape. (PoA 339-343, 361) In this scene alone, we see several instances of wands changing hands, but again, we can assume that every character retains the loyalty of their wand because we never see any instances of someone's wand acting differently after this scene. However, it's very difficult to plausibly say that, in this instance, any character was acting with academic motivation. However, it is easy to see that every character in this scene was acting out of the desire to protect themselves rather than harm anyone else, whether the threat they perceived was real or created in their own mind is irrelevant. However, in this particular scenario, characters are acting with the intent to make someone powerless, similar to how Draco gained the Elder Wand from Dumbledore. But it is important to note that no one is acting with the intent to actually cause harm to anyone else, so there is no malicious intent present. Rather, everyone is acting with the aim of protecting themselves, and the intent is therefore defense, not offense. And it is these

motivations precisely that are the key factors in determining whether or not a wand's allegiance will change.

By looking at these different scenarios, we can begin to see what instances and factors would influence whether or not a wand's allegiance will change. We can see from the examples given that in order for a wizard to take a wand from another, there must be a conscious intent, and a desire to incapacitate the wizard, either physically or magically, so that they are unable to fight back. The intent to dominate someone is crucial when attempting to take a wand. Draco *intended* for Dumbledore to be unarmed and vulnerable. Harry *consciously attempted* to physically overpower Draco. So what we know at this point is that to win a wand, you must have the intent to overpower someone and leave them vulnerable. Keep this in mind as we move forward.

The second part of my analysis focuses on wands as the phallic symbols that they are often seen as. A phallic symbol can be anything phallus either in shape or in nature, and is often used to show the mental, emotional, or physical power of the bearer of the symbol. In the *Harry Potter* series, we see wands as phallic symbols in that they show that wizards are possibly superior to muggles in some aspects, but they can also be used to show how different wizards measure up to each other in skill and power. Dumbledore having the Elder Wand is meant to show his skill as a wizard and the connection between Voldemort's wand and Harry's is an obvious analogy to the struggle the two are embroiled in. However, there is a darker interpretation that can be taken by looking at wands as phallic symbols.

If we look at the fact that intent is key, we must also acknowledge that consent, or a lack of it, is also present. When a wizard's wand is taken from them, it is without their consent. When Draco disarmed Dumbledore in book six, there was a lack of consent on Dumbledore's part. Rowling stated in an interview that in that scene in *Half-Blood Prince* "Dumbledore didn't want to lose his wand at that point and Draco disarmed him." (Rowling n.p.). From this, we can infer that if a wizard is consenting to having his wand taken, the allegiance will likely not change. This would also help explain how no one in Dumbledore's Army lost the loyalty of their wand when they were practicing disarming. They were aware of the possibility that their wand would be taken

from them when their classmates were using them as spell practice, and they were okay with that possible outcome.

One concern that may arise from this proposition is the scene from *Prisoner of Azkaban* that I mentioned earlier. In that scene, there is no consent given in the same way that it is given in the Dumbledore's Army scene. No one goes into the Shrieking Shack assuming that they're going to be disarmed. However, as I stated, both intent and consent are present in every situation. In the Shrieking Shack, there is no consent given, but there is very strong intent. It is, however, intent to protect themselves as I said earlier.

What can we take away from these different analyses? Briefly, you can summarize these different analyses by saying that, in order for a wand's allegiance to change, a spell must be cast not only with the intent to disarm another wizard and make them vulnerable, and the spell meant to disarm them must be cast on them without their consent. When you look at it from this angle, it can become a metaphor for sexual assault. By a wizard not consenting, you are forcefully assaulting them, making them vulnerable, and taking away their power.

Very rarely do we see any of the characters that we consider "good" disarming a character so that they become powerless. Yes, we do see them battle, like the fight between McGonagall and Snape in *Deathly Hallows*, but that's another example of a situation where there is more intent to protect oneself than attack another. Dumbledore is an exception to this rule, as he forcefully took the Elder Wand from Grindlewald. However, we also are aware of Dumbledore's weaknesses and his struggle with his desire for the acquisition of power, because he admits his faults on a few occasions. For instance, when discussing whether or not he should have told Harry about the prophecy sooner (OotP 820-844) and in the King's Cross scene where Dumbledore addresses whether or not he was a good person because he desired the Hallows (DH 713-719). So we are to understand that that was an immoral decision on Dumbledore's part, even though we consider him one of the good characters. Most every other time we see a character being forcibly disarmed and the motivation behind it is not so that someone can protect

themselves, it's a "bad" character casting the spell. Some examples of this are Voldemort killing Snape so he could attempt to gain the allegiance of the Elder Wand and Victor Krum torturing Cedric during the final task of the Triwizard Tournament (GoF 626-627). While we do not usually see Krum as a bad character, in this situation he was under the Imperius Curse and being made to do the bidding of one of the bad characters (GoF 677). So Rowling is showing the idea of forcefully taking another wizard's wand, or power, in a very bad light.

Overall, Rowling has constructed an interesting commentary about consent. She alludes to the idea that consent is a very important concept and that without it, a wizard is taking someone else's property forcefully and in a way that is immoral. Furthermore, if consent is given in a situation when someone's wand is removed, then that person's wand will remain their property. It is just another example of how Rowling is able to write important social commentary into her stories in such a way that it may not be clear until you really begin to examine the evidence.

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