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Divine Destiny or Free Choice: Nietzsche's Strong Wills in the Harry Potter Series

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Under the Direction of Dr. Pearl McHaney

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the influences of fate and free will in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Current scholarship on the topic generally agrees that Rowling champions free will by allowing her characters learning opportunities through their choices. By using Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy on fate and free will and by more closely examining the *Harry Potter* texts, this paper demonstrates fate's stronger presence in Rowling's fictional world. Certain strong-willed characters rise above their peers' fated states by embracing their personal fates and exercising their wills to create themselves within fated destinies. The paper also explores the possibility of an authority directing fate.

INDEX WORDS: Authority, Determinism, Fate, Fatalism, Free will, Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, Nietzsche, Strong will

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Introduction

The *Harry Potter* series, now complete with the publication of the seventh book, has impacted a wide array of readers with nearly unprecedented force; both children and adults have grown into loyal fans of J.K. Rowling's charismatic characters. Readers meet Harry, an awkward, naïve, unpresuming youth nearing his eleventh birthday, in Rowling's first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1997). Through this story, readers begin to form a relationship with Harry, traveling with him from his average London neighborhood into a magical world of wands, ogres, and flying broomsticks, overseen by a Ministry of Magic. Through her prose, Rowling beckons with her imagination, pulling fans deeper into Harry's world in the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1999). Here, she crosses genre boundaries by intricately interweaving fantasy, science fiction, mystery, adventure, and bildungsroman in a single text. With this second book's release, readers began to recognize the series' uniqueness. Richard Robinson, chief executive of Scholastic Books, points out that, "at the beginning, people didn't know what they had. The first story had been simple. It wasn't until the second book that there was a groundswell" (Rozhon par.10).

Although Rowling's audience began appreciating the series' value with the second book, her third swept through multiple countries and languages, "transform[ing her] from popular author to international superstar" (Thøgersen par.119). In this third novel, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), Rowling develops Harry's personality and reveals his past, encouraging readers to identify with this young protagonist as he longs for his parents and rejoices at finding his godfather, Sirius Black. The following story, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), moves the series to a new emotional level as readers witness Cedric Diggory's

murder and Lord Voldemort's physical return. Rowling's success became yet clearer with this publication as Scholastic's first printing totaled seven million books in the U.S. alone. This novel also led the *New York Times Book Review* to create a second list – a children's book list – to accommodate the success of the first four books in the *Harry Potter* series (Corliss par.3).

The books' tone and plot darken with Rowling's fifth installment, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003). Here, Rowling investigates political ideologies as Harry grows more confident, now an intelligent fifteen-year-old who has found family among the friends he fights alongside. And here too, Rowling creates a new level of emotional pain for Harry, which readers experience vicariously, feeling Harry's agony as Sirius leaves him forever. Following the fifth book's publication, Rowling's *Harry Potter* series had sold two-hundred and fifty million copies worldwide and had been translated into fifty-five languages (Watson par.4). The sixth book broke this record, selling almost nine million copies during the first twenty-four hours of its release ("Potter Book" par.1).

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (2005) heightens in suspense as readers see Harry and Albus Dumbledore form a trusting relationship and embark on dangerous quests. But Dumbledore's death leaves Harry lost, confused, and looking for release from his grief. The sixth book increased translations to sixty-one languages, "including Icelandic, Serbo-Croat, Vietnamese, Hebrew, Swahili, Ukrainian, and Afrikaans" (Brown par.1). The Harry Potter brand also offered feature films, video games, candy, key rings, computer games, and much more at this point, valuing the brand at four million dollars (Brown par.1). Finally, Rowling satisfied readers' hunger for revenge, adventure, and triumph in her seventh book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). This novel penetrates the magical world's secrets, bringing Harry and the wizarding community joy, relief, and success. Many readers reported strong emotional

reactions following this conclusion to the series, leading one grief counselor to publicize her willingness to help parents and children with the pain caused by characters' deaths ("Highmark"). Surely this reading and publishing phenomenon may be attributed to Rowling's skill.

Undeniably, the series has prospered, and its strongest draw remains its main character, Harry. By maturing with Harry through the books' ten-year publication journey, many young readers grew to love him and to feel intimately familiar with him. When describing her first conception of Harry while aboard a London train, Rowling admits to this same intimate feeling: "I can't describe the excitement to someone who doesn't write books except to say it was that incredibly elated feeling you get when you've just met someone with whom you might eventually fall in love […] That was the feeling I had getting off the train. As though I'd just met someone wonderful, and we were about to embark on this wonderful affair" (Thøgersen par.10). Rowling's excitement translates through her writing, allowing readers to experience their own reading affairs with Harry.

Through Harry's perspective, readers face a number of themes in Rowling's series, spanning from adolescent maturity to a mythological quest and all its adornments. This range of themes and motifs has spawned dozens of critical studies as the series sold millions of copies and elicited an enthusiastic reaction from readers as shown in the multi-generational readership, the publication anticipation, and the global interest.[1] Since the series' first book was published in 1997, engaged readers have composed hundreds of scholarly articles, internet discussions, conference panels, and newspaper reviews, considering *Harry Potter* from various critical perspectives.

One important theme, however, although addressed by passionate Potter fans, has escaped the academic community's attention: the influences of fate and free will in Harry's world. The tension that Rowling creates between these two forces clearly surfaces in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* as Voldemort addresses his Death Eaters at the novel's opening. Pondering his culpability in Harry's continued survival, Voldemort admits, "I have been careless, and so have been thwarted by luck and chance, those wreckers of all but the best-laid plans. But I know better now. I understand those things that I did not understand before. I must be the one to kill Harry Potter, and I shall be" (7). Within this statement, Rowling demonstrates the duality of fate and free will and their presences in her fictitious world. Voldemort first blames "luck and chance" for his failure to destroy Harry; he communicates the necessity of "best-laid plans," plans that he previously had formed only carelessly. By placing blame upon himself, Voldemort accuses his volition and choice as responsible for the outcome of events. Voldemort then explains that he now understands how he "*must* be the one to kill Harry" (my italics), insinuating a belief in fate by understanding "those things that [he] did not understand before." He did not understand until this moment that he must follow fate's rules to fulfill the prophecy. When attempting to work outside of fate's boundaries, Voldemort repeatedly failed, but he informs his Death Eaters that he has now recognized his mistake and plans to work within his prescribed boundaries.

This tension between fate and free will extends throughout all seven novels, but the *Harry Potter* scholarship still lacks an academic study addressing this duality. Currently, discussions of fate and free will remain limited to personal internet websites and religious analysis. For instance, in *Saga Journal: An Academic Star Wars Fan Journal*, published online by an author known only as "Matril," appears "'The Chosen One': Prophecy, Destiny and Free

Will in *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*." In her essay, Matril recognizes that "the works of George Lucas and J.K. Rowling both contain prophecies that raise the age-old question of fate versus free will. The dilemma is apparent. If someone is able to accurately foresee future events, does it follow that those events are inevitable?" (par. 1). Matril asks an important question of Rowling's text, a question similarly phrased in other website discussions. On Mugglenet, another *Harry Potter* fan site, Lauren Dworsky considers this same theme, concluding that, "though the text more often supports free will explicitly in the choices, actions, and responsibilities of the characters, the way that Rowling sets up her universe with prophecies, time travel, characterizations, and nomenclature also shows deterministic leanings" (par. 16). Such analysis, while often intriguing, remains superficial and brief, leaving many questions unanswered. Even popular media such as newspapers, however, recognize the binary forces at work in Rowling's novels. Book critic for *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani accurately predicted of *The Deathly Hallows* that, "[Harry Potter] will be forced to ponder the equation between fraternity and independence, free will and fate, and to come to terms with his own frailties and those of others" (par. 8). By recognizing these forces, Kakutani further demonstrates the need for an analysis of this theme. Catherine and David Deavel offer academic insight into the importance of choice in *Harry Potter* as well, couching their argument in religious terms and striving to reconcile the values presented by Rowling with religious morals and beliefs. The Deveals' thesis reveals that their essay

> will explore what kind of character Rowling holds up as a model for civilization by showing her emphasis on choice versus destiny, how choices must be made according to the criteria of truth and absolute moral limits, and the deeper magic of love, which is sacrificial and forgiving and which is taught most often in the

context of the family" (50).

Although engaging, this article examines free will and choice from a religious perspective rather than a literary perspective. Thus, the current literature offered on fate and free will in *Harry Potter* lacks a serious literary critique of Rowling's world and the forces under which it functions.

I propose to provide this examination, weighing the effects and strengths of free will and fate in the *Harry Potter* series. Where such evidence as Harry's decisions, Dumbledore's insistence on moral action, and Voldemort's choice of Harry over Neville Longbottom often convince readers of a world enjoying free will, I argue that such magical tools as the Sorting Hat, wands, the Goblet of Fire, and prophecies provide equal evidence for fate's power. Therefore, I intend to compare these arguments to discover whether one force outweighs the other. To do this, I will use Friedrich Nietzsche's theory on fate and free will to define critical terms and to illuminate how these forces function. Nietzsche argues that fate and free will balance each other, for as Nietzsche argues, "Free will without fate is just as unthinkable as spirit without reality, good without evil. Only antithesis creates the quality" ("Fate and History" 14). This balance in the *Harry Potter* series is created when characters such as Harry illustrate Nietzsche's strong-willed individual. Rowling creates Harry as a character with whom many readers identify in his maturation and naivety. She also raises him from a person of average potential to the strong-willed young man, successful in his adventures. Other characters also deserving of critical analysis include Neville, Dumbledore, and Voldemort, who all mimic this process. Finally, I will consider the possibility of an authority that allows free will or determines fate and will analyze Rowling's themes of death and the afterlife as they relate to fate's role in this magical world.

Although much writing has appeared concerning the *Harry Potter* series, the existing discussions offer first readings, incomplete without the seventh novel, and often insubstantial in their initial treatments of the series. I propose to offer a close reading with a narrow focus, striving to create serious scholarly criticism on *Harry Potter*, criticism I think the series deserves. Although hoping to engage a variety of readers, I specifically write for *Harry Potter* readers, those familiar with the series, its characters, and its plot.

Chapter 1: The Battle Between Fate and Free Will

"The makers of legend have seldom rested content to regard the world's great heroes as mere human beings who broke past the horizons that limited their fellows and returned with such boons as any man with equal faith and courage might have found. On the contrary, the tendency has always been to endow the hero with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth, or even the moment of conception. The whole hero-life is shown to have been a pageant of marvels with the great central adventure as its culmination." – Joseph Campbell

Although the *Harry Potter* discussions currently circulating in print and online often reference textual passages that support free will's presence in Rowling's series, these reviews and essays also recognize fate's presence, a presence these readers find difficult to explain. On the one hand, in Harry's world, fate limits the characters' free agency, guiding their choices through their predetermined personalities. On the other hand, certain magical objects encourage readers to question fate's power by increasing the characters' individual strengths and skills. By considering the animate and inanimate forces influencing wizards' lives, we may begin to analyze fate and free will in the *Harry Potter* series.

As Lauren Dworsky points out, fatalism certainly exercises power in Harry's world: "[T]here is a concrete genetic determinism in the *Harry Potter* novels. For one, a person is born a witch or a wizard; talents are inherent, as well as strengths and weaknesses. One cannot achieve wizard status through effort" alone (par.14). Characters such as Argus Filch, the Hogwarts caretaker, illustrate her observation. Although Filch descends from wizarding parents, he inherits almost no magical talent, and thus earns the derogatory label "Squib," wizards' title for their magically-handicapped peers. Filch conceals this highly embarrassing disability until Harry accidentally discovers the secret while waiting for Filch in his office. There, Harry finds evidence of Filch's failed attempts to learn magic (*Chamber of Secrets* 127-8). Filch's failure leads us to understand that wizardry is genetic, a characteristic determined by fate, not by birth right. Hermione and other mixed-blood wizards provide additional examples of this fated

phenomenon, for they represent wizards who descend from two nonmagical parents, the reverse of Filch's situation. Apparently, in Harry's world, magic constitutes a fated skill; it can not be learned, controlled, or anticipated. Instead, a higher force seems to choose at random those gifted with magic, regardless of parentage. Yet, even in the face of such evidence of fate, many reader-reviews demonstrate that Rowling encourages choice in her series, in the form of free will, as well. Dworsky admits this encouragement by pointing to those characters born into long-standing, pure-blood traditions who exercise their wills in choosing either to follow tradition or to recreate themselves: "Sirius Black, Harry's godfather, grew up in a pure-blood wizard family that emphasized blood and dark magic, yet Sirius detested everything they stood for and took his life in the opposite direction. Dobby, a House Elf, went against the doctrine that House Elves are to always obey their masters" (par.5). Sirius and Dobby exemplify characters who take opportunities to dismiss expectation created by fate and to create their own identities, but do these strong-willed characters represent a majority or a minority of liberated characters? Do other examples of choice and character agency exist? Dobby represents the only house elf readers encounter who desires anything different from what fate has handed him, and he suffers from ridicule for this difference. Draco Malfoy, however, starkly contrasts Sirius, as Draco represents another dark pure-blooded wizarding descendent who, although occasionally revealing reluctance and even repugnance at his family's role in Voldemort's rise to power, still follows orders and remains entrenched in his legacy. Draco differs from Sirius and Doby by failing to exercise his choice to do good.

Sirius and Dobby do not offer enough evidence to determine whether all Rowling's characters enjoy free will's freedom. Catherine and David Deavel argue for fate's presence in Harry's world as revealed through the wizarding art of prophecy: "This notion of fate is

amplified by the voices in the magical world who swear by the stars and the seers of the spirit world" (51). Professor Sibyll Trelawney, instructor in Divination, and the centaurs, represented by Bane, assume that fate controls, or at least strongly influences, lives: "In Bane's mind, the stars foretold the future, not something that *might* happen. What was seen in the stars was inevitable fate, and this belief led him not to oppose Voldemort himself" (Prinzi par. 12). Since the centaurs saw by the stars a great war approaching, they choose to allow fate's fruition rather than attempt to interfere with the future of their world.

With these arguments for both fate and free will before us, how do we decide if Harry Potter's world functions under fate or if the characters choose their own paths? The examples of both forces continue to confront readers throughout Rowling's text. The series' most important prophecy, delivered before Harry's birth but not revealed to him until his sixteenth year, directs readers' attentions to yet another predetermined aspect of this fictional world. Following Harry's ill-planned and unsuccessful rescue mission to the Department of Mysteries in search of Sirius Black, Dumbledore speaks to Harry, explaining a piece of Harry's history that Dumbledore now regrets having withheld. This momentous conversation between Harry and Dumbledore alters Harry's journey as Dumbledore discusses his own interference in Harry's acquisition of life-altering knowledge.[1] During this conversation, Dumbledore reveals that sixteen years prior, he interviewed Sibyll Trelawney for the Hogwarts Divination teaching position. Following a disappointing interview, Professor Trelawney suddenly delivered an authentic and valuable prophecy concerning Harry:

> *THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD APPROACHES…BORN TO THOSE WHO HAVE THRICE DEFIED HIM, BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES…AND THE DARK LORD WILL MARK HIM AS HIS EQUAL, BUT HE WILL HAVE POWER THE DARK LORD*

KNOWS NOT…AND EITHER MUST DIE AT THE HAND OF THE OTHER FOR NEITHER CAN LIVE WHILE THE OTHER SURVIVES… (*Order* 841)

This prophecy largely accounts for Harry's unusual life, his fame, his personal desire for vengeance against Voldemort, and the increasingly difficult trials facing him each year he spends at Hogwarts. The prophecy also introduces fate's presence, a presence previously downplayed until Dumbledore's revelation.

Harry's prophecy does not stand alone in its influence on wizards' lives. The Ministry of Magic stores thousands of prophecies, revealing fate's wide-reaching hand: "They were there, they had found the place: high as a church and full of nothing but towering shelves covered in small, dusty, glass orbs. They glimmered dully in the light issuing from more candle brackets set at intervals along the shelves" (*Order* 777). As revealed here, countless events have been prophesized and captured within glass orbs. Countless lives have therefore been impacted by a fate that guides the future, and, as Dworsky notices, the *Harry Potter* books never mention an unfulfilled prophecy; Dumbledore does not provide this possibility for Harry's prophecy either (par.12). When explaining the prophecy's content to Harry, Dumbledore assures him with finality that the prophecy will come to fruition: "'So,' said Harry, dredging up the words from what felt like a deep well of despair inside him, 'so does that mean that…that one of us has got to kill the other one…in the end?' 'Yes,' said Dumbledore" (*Order* 844). The headmaster leaves no room for doubt; Harry has no choice.[2] By the series' conclusion, readers know that, in this conversation about the prophecy, Dumbledore still retains knowledge of Harry's necessary sacrifice, but never does Dumbledore overtly lie to Harry concerning the prophecy's inevitability.

There are some readers, however, that question the prophecy's value. James Smith wonders, "[I]t's hard to know why Dumbledore seems so convinced that *this* prophecy (about Harry and Voldemort) is real" given Professor Trelawney's unfortunate history of false shock-predictions (par.9). In comparing the predictions in *Harry Potter* to Biblical prophecy, Smith claims that it is important to "consider the source" (par.9). According to Smith, false predictions warned Old Testament believers away from potentially false prophets. If Rowling's characters applied this test to Trelawney, they would also dismiss the prophecy concerning Harry because of Trelawney's unfortunate record and reputation for false predictions (par.9). In delivering the prophecy concerning Harry, however, "when Sibyll Trelawney spoke, it was not in her usual ethereal, mystic voice, but in the harsh, hoarse tones Harry had heard her use once before" (*Order* 841). Rowling's description of Trelawney's voice explains why Dumbledore believes that this particular prophecy contains truth. This difference, not just in tone but in voice, implies that Trelawney no longer controls her body; something or someone else speaks through her – something that can foretell the future and speaks truly. In Harry's world, characters can not determine a prophet's reliability based on her history of successful or unsuccessful predictions, for fate removes agency from the prophets.

The Sorting Hat also demonstrates influences of both fate and free will in Harry's world. The hat, brought before the Hogwarts students on the first night of each school year, sorts first year students into one of four houses: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, or Slytherin. The hat identifies student personalities, potentials, and temperaments, sorting them into the community that best fits their strengths. During Harry's class's sorting ceremony, the Sorting Hat sings, "*There's nothing hidden in your heart / The Sorting Hat can't see, / So try me on and I will tell you / Where you ought to be*" (*Sorcerer's* 117). This ceremony also points to fate's role in human

character. With only rare exceptions, so far as the text reveals, the hat does not offer students a choice in whom they want to become, with whom they want to spend their time, or in how they perceive themselves. The Sorting Hat makes these decisions for them. Farah Mendlesohn agrees that this magical object exposes a lack of free will in the wizarding community: "Although Albus Dumbledore and other good people preach moral freedom, the evidence is all around Harry that very little is about personal choice. The visible illustration of this sits in front of him once a year: the Sorting Hat" (171). By removing choice, Rowling offers her characters predetermined futures. Rebecca Skulnick and Jesse Goodman assent: "The Sorting Hat not only validates the power of Hogwarts but also demonstrates the dissonance between self-determination and predetermination: are civic identities comprised of choices or are they a birthright?" (266)

The Hat appears to tap into some force of fate, acquiring the power to foresee students' yet-unformed characters, but how does this ability reconcile with the exceptional choice the Sorting Hat gives Harry between Gryffindor and Slytherin? As Harry awaits his own sorting, "sometimes, [he] noticed, the hat shouted out the house at once, but at others it took a little while to decide. 'Finnigan, Seamus,' the sandy-haired boy next to Harry in the line, sat on the stool for almost a whole minute before the hat declared him a Gryffindor" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 120). The text does not tell readers if other students, whose sorting takes time, receive a choice from the Sorting Hat, but it is clear that some students have easily determined personalities while others require consideration. The Hat immediately proclaims a house the moment it touches many students' heads, but, with Harry, it takes its time: "'Hmm,' said a small voice in his ear. 'Difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind either. There's talent, oh my goodness, yes – and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that's interesting…So where shall I put you?'" (*Sorcerer's* 121) The Sorting Hat's audible pondering casts doubt on Harry's future.

What will he become? Does he stand at a crossroads where his choice will determine his personality? And why does Harry receive this choice from the Sorting Hat when other students apparently are not granted time to discuss their preferences? Although the seven books discuss no other student's personal experience with the Sorting Hat, Harry speaks to his son Albus in the final scene of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, assuaging Albus's fears by confiding the choice that the Sorting Hat gave Harry so long ago: "'It doesn't matter to us, Al. But if it matters to you, you'll be able to choose Gryffindor over Slytherin. The Sorting Hat takes your choice into account.' 'Really?' 'It did for me,' said Harry" (758). Harry assumes that because he received a choice, the Sorting Hat also offers others a choice, but readers never discover the answer to this mystery. Since Rowling closes her series with this conversation, however, she places some importance on choice with the conversation's finality and Harry's assuredness. Dworsky agrees that the Sorting Hat did not place Harry in Gryffindor because of fate: "Harry wasn't born a Gryffindor; he was a Gryffindor because of his choices. That is, he defined himself" (par.4). The Sorting Hat then leaves us with even more questions: How does the Sorting Hat function? What does it tell readers about fate and free will? Is Harry special? Is he granted choice that others are denied? These questions reveal the difficulty encountered in *Harry Potter* discussions and reviews to determine whether fate or free will reign in Harry's world. Other magical objects give us clearer answers to these questions.

Wands represent a second type of magical object through which fate works. In Harry's world, wands choose their wizards, removing agency and revealing wizards' fated futures. When Harry accompanies Hagrid, Hogwarts' half-ogre gamekeeper and Harry's close friend, to purchase his wand, he discovers a certain powerlessness in choice. Mr. Ollivander, a wandmaker, remarks on the wand that chooses Harry: "Yes, thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Curious indeed

how these things happen. The wand chooses the wizard, remember…I think we must expect great things from you, Mr. Potter…After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things – terrible, yes, but great" (*Sorcerer's* 85). Ollivander looks for a parallel between Harry's and Voldemort's lives, having made their wands and knowing that their wands' cores both contain phoenix feathers from the same bird. Harry's wand appears to access or to understand Harry's future potential, a potential also recognized by Voldemort's wand, and in recognizing this potential, it chooses him. Sarah Gibbons remarks that the wand's choice demonstrates a relationship between wand and wizard: "Harry does not choose the wand with the phoenix feather, it instead chooses him. Like any traditional hero, or any consumer within a constructed market, Harry has a reciprocal relationship with his destiny" (93). Gibbons supports both fate and free will, for "reciprocal relationship" suggests that both choice and destiny are at work in Harry's life. Hermione then reminds Harry (and readers) of this reciprocal relationship when she coyly informs Harry, "Wands are only as powerful as the wizards who use them. Some wizards just like to boast that theirs are bigger and better than other people's" (*Deathly* 415). The wand may choose the wizard from some knowledge of the wizard's future, but the wizard's strength and ability limit the wand's power. Once again, both fate and free will work in Harry's life and world.

Wand lore grows in importance in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* as Voldemort searches for a wand that will transcend the link forged between himself and Harry, the link Voldemort discovers in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. In this book, Voldemort traps Harry within the cemetery in which Voldemort's deceased father lies, and upon engaging Harry in combat, Voldemort discovers the secret of the twin wand cores. His inability to overcome Harry's wand in this battle causes him to search subsequently for other means of destroying

Harry. His quest for the Elder wand, the famed unbeatable wand, reveals much to readers about wand lore. Once Harry realizes Voldemort's goal, he seeks information from Ollivander. During their conversation, Ollivander's information surprises Harry and enlightens him as to wands' real power: "where a wand has been won, its allegiance will change […] 'You talk about wands like they've got feelings,' said Harry, 'like they can think for themselves.' 'The wand chooses the wizard,' said Ollivander. 'That much has always been clear to those of us who have studied wand lore' (*Deathly* 493-4). Fate seems to control this relationship between wand and wizard as these magical objects somewhat determine their owners' futures. A wand does not function properly if stolen or otherwise taken from its original owner without having been fairly won. Instead, the wand retains its original loyalty, refusing to work with the new owner until he has proven his rightful and deserving ownership: "Subtle laws govern wand ownership, but the conquered wand will usually bend its will to its new master," explains Ollivander (*Deathly* 494). Wands apparently have a will, and their influence upon their owners displaces some amount of the wizard's agency. Harry's wand completely overpowers Harry's agency when it defends him of its own accord. As Harry and the Order of the Phoenix members race to escape Death Eaters in the opening of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry's wand battles Voldemort independently: "As the pain from Harry's scar forced his eyes shut, his wand acted of its own accord. He felt it drag his hand around like some great magnet, saw a spurt of golden fire through his half-closed eyelids, heard a crack and a scream of fury. The remaining Death Eater yelled: Voldemort screamed, '*No!*'" (61). Even though Ron, Hermione, and others later attribute this triumph to Harry's strength, Harry remains convinced of his wand's independent power.

The Goblet of Fire, another of Rowling's magical objects, further reveals fatalism at work in her fictitious world. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Hogwarts hosts the

Triwizard Tournament, wherein champions from each wizarding school -- Beauxbatons, Durmstrang, and Hogwarts -- compete in a series of tasks for their school's honor and a monetary prize. The Goblet of Fire determines which students compete as champions, as Dumbledore explains: "Anybody wishing to submit themselves as champion must write their name and school clearly upon a slip of parchment and drop it into the goblet […] Tomorrow night, Halloween, the goblet will return the names of the three it has judged most worthy to represent their schools" (255-6). The students freely choose to enter their names for consideration; however, the champions have been predecided, fated by their inborn characters whether the Goblet chooses the champions or the champions' self-determined worth influences their elections. The Goblet functions as another tool of fate by naming the champions and binding these students to their paths, for as Dumbledore explains further, "Once a champion has been selected by the Goblet of Fire, he or she is obliged to see the tournament through to the end. The placing of your name in the goblet constitutes a binding, magical contract" (256). The Goblet names Harry as a fourth champion even though Harry did not enter his name because he remains too young for the Goblet to consider him as a champion, but neither Harry nor any professor can change the Goblet's decision once made (271). For Harry, these surprising events remind him of his powerlessness; he seems fated to a heroic life, regardless of his own wishes, as the Goblet of Fire demonstrates.

In Harry's world fate works not only through powers and objects such as prophecies, the Sorting Hat, wands, and the Goblet, but fate also works through people. Repeatedly, other characters decide Harry's future for him, again and again depriving him of freedom and choice. For example, before Harry's eleventh birthday, the Dursleys control Harry's life, keeping from him knowledge of his past and understanding of his identity (*Sorcerer's* 49). In *Harry Potter and*

the Chamber of Secrets, Dobby repeatedly assumes control over the course of events by intercepting Ron's and Hermione's letters during the summer, by sealing the barrier to platform nine and three-quarters, causing Harry to miss the Hogwarts Express, and by sending a bludger after Harry in a Quidditch match, forcing Harry to regrow all the bones in his arm. Yet again, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, many adults intercede while attempting to protect Harry from perceived danger: "Everyone from the Minister of Magic downward has been trying to keep famous Harry Potter safe from Sirius Black" (284). All these characters as enactors of fate unknowingly drive Harry toward his destiny by attempting to control or to direct his life, while controlled and directed themselves by fate.

More than anyone else, however, it is Professor Dumbledore through whom fate works its way with Harry. Even at the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore remains a mystery to his readers. We recognize his wisdom, his experience, his power, and his understanding of the human heart, but Rowling never explains the potency or origins of these strengths. Dumbledore offers the series a god-like figure, a seemingly omnipotent enigma, fighting on Harry's side. Most reader discussions claiming free will's triumph over fate in the *Harry Potter* books turn to Dumbledore for evidence of this triumph as Dumbledore champions the learning and knowledge that choice encourages. For Dumbledore, the freedom to choose and to experience consequences of choice promotes maturation and wisdom. Dumbledore appears to understand these forces more clearly than any other character, and turning to him for answers should provide understanding of fate and free will in his world. For instance, in analyzing Dumbledore's pedagogy, Torbjørn Knutsen argues that, "Dumbledore puts a greater emphasis on the importance of individual choice […] appreciat[ing] virtues like courage, cooperation, honesty, diligence, and decency; but only Dumbledore stresses emphatically that such virtues are

taught through students' wrestling with real choices" (204). Readers can certainly recognize this statement's truth in the text. Dumbledore repeatedly withholds information from Harry, encouraging him to discover things for himself and to make his own decisions.[3] Knutsen then argues that Dumbledore encourages virtue in his students by championing choice:

> Dumbledore's pedagogic insight is simple: Virtue is a function of choice, and if people have no choice, they can have not moral qualities. In a predetermined world ethics is emptied of meaning. But in a world where individuals can make choices, practical reason will evolve and people may develop a real sense of right and wrong. Dumbledore's project is to teach his students to choose wisely, because only then can they be free. (206)

Knutsen claims that Dumbledore has a motive in encouraging choice; Dumbledore wishes to instruct through the freedom he allows and promotes. In this way, "choice itself is not what Dumbledore promotes, but rather the choice of the good" (Deavel 54). Knutsen and Deavel assert that, as the series' authority, Dumbledore advocates free choice, placing its importance and strength above fate's. However, the text that these discussions use in drawing their conclusions about Dumbledore warrants further exploration. When Harry and Dumbledore reconvene at the end of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry confides his anxiety of the choice that the Sorting Hat allowed him. Once presented with the choice between Gryffindor and Slytherin, Harry ever after fears his Slytherin characteristics. But Dumbledore assures Harry that, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (333). This single line convinces many readers of Rowling's personal support of choice and free will, but if we consider this statement more carefully, we see that Dumbledore actually supports fate. According to his statement, Dumbledore tells Harry that choices only "show" or reveal character; choice can not

make or create personalities. Choice reveals true identity, identities not necessarily formed freely. Later in the conversation, Dumbledore again attempts to soothe Harry by reminding him of his use of Godric Gryffindor's sword in killing the basilisk: "'Only a true Gryffindor could have pulled *that* out of the hat, Harry,' said Dumbledore simply" (334). Harry's physical removal of the sword from the hat strongly parallels boy Arthur's removal of Excalibur from the stone, identifying Arthur as the true King of England. But what does Dumbledore mean by "true Gryffindor"? Does he imply that Harry decided to act as a brave man, or, as Arthur finds himself fated to a path of leadership, does the sword of Gryffindor simply represent Harry's destiny to become the hero that he is fated to be? By Dumbledore's use of "true Gryffindor," it appears that he refers to a deep, fated characteristic within Harry as opposed to any particular choices Harry makes. Maybe Dumbledore recognizes Harry as embodying the King Arthur of his world, fated to lead and fated to make personal sacrifices for the greater good.

As these passages demonstrate, Dumbledore does not necessarily recognize a free will. In fact, Dumbledore's strength and wit at times translate into control. While providing the compass for Harry's life and the answers to Harry's riddles, his "greatest protector" (*Half-Blood* 645), Dumbledore also guides Harry along a fated path from *the Sorcerer's Stone* to *the Deathly Hallows*. Dumbledore makes his first decision regarding Harry's future by leaving infant Harry on the Dursley's doorstep. Although recognizing the safety that this house provides Harry, Dumbledore also has a second, less objective motive. When Professor McGonagall realizes Dumbledore's plans for Harry, she protests: "Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain this in a letter? These people will never understand him! He'll be famous – a legend," but Dumbledore responds, "Exactly […] It would be enough to turn any boy's head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won't even remember! Can't you see how much

better off he'll be, growing up away from all that until he's ready to take it?" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 13). Dumbledore decides Harry's future, based not only on Harry's well-being, but also on a particular desire for Harry's character. Dumbledore's decision somewhat molds Harry according to the headmaster's plans for him. Harry begins to recognize Dumbledore's influence at the end of his first year at Hogwarts:

> He's a funny man, Dumbledore. I think he sort of wanted to give me a chance […] I reckon he had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help. I don't think it was an accident he let me find out how the mirror worked. It's almost like he thought I had the right to face Voldemort if I could. (302)

Harry interprets Dumbledore's interference as a positive act at first, but he begins to perceive a negative consequence in the final book as he feels the full weight of Dumbledore's bequeathed burden in the quest he must now fulfill. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry learns that Dumbledore shaped the course of Harry's life all along – even in Dumbledore's death. Once Harry obtains Severus Snape's memories, he realizes that once Dumbledore had passed away, he worked through his portrait hanging in the headmaster's office. From the wall, Dumbledore leads Snape to preserve Harry's life until the time for his demise approaches. Harry responds to this new knowledge with resignation: "Dumbledore's betrayal was almost nothing. Of course there had been a bigger plan; Harry had simply been too foolish to see it, he realized that now" (692). Throughout each novel, the headmaster subtly yet firmly directs Harry's experiences, the final book detailing Harry's attempt to accomplish Dumbledore's last task in destroying Voldemort's Horcruxes and finally Voldemort himself. While intending, in most cases, to help Harry,

Dumbledore serves as another of fate's tools, encouraging and leading Harry down a path over which Harry exercises little free will.

Harry himself, our guide and hero, explains his life's events and his success through the foretold prophecy. In Harry's final duel with Voldemort, the Dark Lord attempts to break Harry's resolve by explaining away his successes as mere accidents; but Harry dismisses this possibility, replying as one who both loathes and accepts his fate:

> "Accident, was it, when my mother died to save me?" asked Harry. They were still moving sideways, both of them, in that perfect circle, maintaining the same distance from each other, and for Harry no face existed but Voldemort's.
>
> "Accident, when I decided to fight in that graveyard? Accident, that I didn't defend myself tonight, and still survived, and returned to fight again?" (*Deathly* 738)

Harry retains confidence in his destiny and the necessity of his encounter with Voldemort. This belief lends him strength to face his great opponent. When others compliment Harry, attributing his ability and gifts to the magic he performs and the success he achieves, Harry energetically rejects responsibility: "'Listen to me!' said Harry, almost angrily, because Ron and Hermione were both smirking now. 'Just listen to me, all right? It sounds great when you say it like that, but all that stuff was luck – I didn't know what I was doing half the time, I didn't plan any of it, I just did whatever I could think of, and I nearly always had help'" (*Order* 327). Harry is right. Much of his success is "luck," and he does benefit from the help of various friends along the way. But that fact does not detract from Harry's heroic role. He was simply fated to this quest, as Edmund Kern claims: "Despite some cheery optimism, Harry has a pronounced sense of fatalism – that is, he recognizes how events unfold around him, drawing him into circumstances not of his

own making" (32).[4] Harry chooses to accept this fate and to embody it, fulfilling his potential. And Harry is not the only character that recognizes this fatalism.

Snape, although not usually trusted to have an objective opinion concerning Harry, represents one such character who recognizes the fatalism at work in Harry's life. Commenting to Bellatrix Lestrange, Snape jeers, "Of course, it became apparent to me very quickly that he had no extraordinary talent at all. He has fought his way out of a number of tight corners by a simple combination of sheer luck and more talented friends. He is mediocre to the last degree, though as obnoxious and self-satisfied as was his father before him" (*Half-Blood* 31). Snape overstates Harry's lack of special characteristics, yet his comment rings somewhat true. Dean Thomas, a fellow Gryffindor student at Hogwarts, speaks to Harry's destined role more favorably: "'I know Harry Potter,' said Dean. 'And I reckon he's the real thing – the Chosen One, or whatever you want to call it'" (*Deathly* 299). Dean points out that Harry is meant for success and fame. So then, with these magical powers, objects, and people working as fate's tools, with Harry's own admittance as to fate's role in his life, and with other characters' recognition of fate guiding Harry, why do so many critics still claim that, "the truth is that Harry's destiny depends on him" (Deavel 53), that "Harry is responsible for all his actions, which affect everyone around him" (Dworsky 2), and that "choice – more than talent of predisposition – matters most of all" (Kakutani 3)? Nietzsche's philosophy on fate and free will helps us answer this question by demonstrating the balance possible between fate and free will in an individual's life.

Chapter 2: Nietzsche's Theory

Nietzsche's position on fate and free will surfaces only sporadically in his literature and in its succeeding criticism, especially compared to his recurrent theories on human will to power, religion, morality, and virtue. Yet Nietzsche's treatment of fate and free will spans across most of the philosopher's works including such early essays as "Fatum und Geschichte" and "Willensfreiheit und Fatum" and through such late texts as *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Twilight of the Idols*. Stylistically, Nietzsche buries brief notes within his short epigrams, creating a difficult task of uncovering the thought fragments with which to reconstruct his polished philosophy. Then, once these fragments reach light, Nietzsche appears to contradict himself: he resolutely claims that humans lead predetermined lives, lives hemmed by circumstance and physical limitation. But he also claims that strong-willed humans – what he labels independent spirits – can will themselves to improve, excelling above their weaker peers. Once readers piece together Nietzsche's puzzle, they discover that fate and free will do not contradict each other, do not exist solely at the other's necessary demise in Nietzsche's view; instead, Nietzsche understands fate and free will as complementary aspects that each individual must learn to balance in order to achieve ultimate human potential.

In Nietzsche's final work, *The Will to Power*, published posthumously and consisting of scattered notes addressing a variety of topics, Nietzsche writes, "There exists neither 'spirit,' nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use" (*Will* 266). Nietzsche categorically embraces fate's control over human life and argues that fate not only controls events and their outcomes, but also that fate molds our characters before birth, shaping our new lives. Nel Grillaert, a Nietzsche scholar, explains that Nietzsche "insists that from birth on, humans do not begin life as a *tabula rasa*; their personality and activity are

already partially conditioned by factors prior to their existence. Man's destiny is to some extent sketched out; the outlines of the personal fate are drawn in the soul" (52). For Nietzsche, fate appears all-encompassing, working in all aspects of life. Nietzsche explains that we can recognize this fatalism through the lasting influence of childhood's environmental elements on our adult identities: "We are determined in our innermost being by the impressions of our childhood, the influence of our parents, our educations. These deeply rooted prejudices are not so easily removed by reasoning of mere will" ("Fate and History" 13). Wills, if they exist, remain too weak to counterbalance fate's strength. Predetermined genetics and childhood experiences shape us although we usually remain ignorant of fate, believing ourselves to choose freely the very things determined from our conceptions. No choice or act is free, according to Nietzsche, because "We have been influenced. And we lack the strength to react against this influence or even to recognize that we have been influenced" ("Fate and History" 14).

This stark position seems to eclipse the possibility for free will and choice, and Nietzsche offers two reasons for dismissing free will. First, Nietzsche argues, free will necessitates a differentiation of events between agent and action, but this differentiation does not exist, he claims, since, in an event, the action contains all the meaning and importance:

> There is no independent "subject" that lies behind human action; the dichotomy between agent and act is artificial and deceptive […] The belief in free will presupposes that the agent can be isolated from the act, an idea that is absurd in the light of the constant flowing that constitutes reality. (Grillaert 44)

Nietzsche explains the distinction between agent and action as a product of linguistic habit; because we typically use two words to describe an event (an action as caused by an agent, a predicate and a subject) we naturally assume a distinction between the two. This distinction,

however, is false, according to Nietzsche, as he perceives only a single entity – the action. If there survives only action, then free will cannot exist, as it depends on an agent and the agent's liberated decision. Grillaert explains, "[I]n Nietzsche's view, the false dichotomy between agent and act, and thereby the concept of free will, finds its origin in our language […] Grammatical categories, words, concepts do not reflect the continuous flux of reality […] The concept of free will is thus a linguistic construction, a fiction, designated for disentangling the chaos in reality and rendering meaning to human existence" (45). For this linguistic reason, Nietzsche dismisses free will.

Second, Nietzsche understands free will as a concept designed by religious men as a means of threatening their congregations with an afterlife. Humanity receives either reward or punishment for its earthly behavior (Grillaert 45). If free will not does not exist and our lives unfold as dictated by fate, then religion has no grounds for demanding certain moral conduct as fate predetermines our behavior. With the concept of free will, however, religion holds the individual responsible, creating accountability and consequence: "Nietzsche thus opposes to the idea of free will because it creates a deceptive dichotomy between agent and act, based on our grammatical differentiation between subject and object, and it is designed for justifying the Christian doctrine of ultimate judgment in the afterlife and for reconciling the idea of a good God with the evil done in the world" (Grillaert 45). These two explanations give insight into Nietzsche's rationalization for fate's hand in human life.

We may define Nietzsche's belief in fate as "fatalism," as opposed to its counterpart "determinism." Although easily confused and often used interchangably, the two theories differ drastically in explaining why an event necessarily occurs. Where determinism necessitates a force or condition that causes all events to follow systematically, fatalism holds the final event

most important, although still interested in the influences that lead to its occurrence: "[Determinism] insists that whatever happens can (in principle) be explained in terms of prior causes (events, states of affairs, inherent structures, plus the laws of nature). [Fatalism] insists that whatever happens *must* happen, but there need be no effort to specify the causal etiology behind the modal 'must,' although it would also be a mistake to interpret fatalism as *excluding* any such effort" (Solomon 66).[1] Fatalism therefore allows for more variation. Although necessitated, outcomes may succeed from a combination of many variable factors rather than a single set of necessary and linked causes. Nietzsche favors fatalism, leading to his definition of destiny as "an outcome that is necessary given some larger sense of purpose as well as the character, abilities, and circumstances of the person or a people. And it presupposes culture and history, a context in which destiny can play itself out" (Solomon 68). The delineations between these definitions of determinism, fatalism, and destiny will prove important for our discussion of Nietzsche's theories at work in *Harry Potter*.

Nietzsche more clearly defines free will. This force permits complete freedom: "Free will appears as unfettered, deliberate; it is boundlessly free, wandering, the spirit. But fate is a necessity: unless we believe that world history is a dream-error, the unspeakable sorrows of mankind fantasies, and that we ourselves are but the toys of our fantasies" ("Fate and History" 14). Nietzsche does not see how humanity could progress or prosper if left solely to our "fantasies," but he allows for some remnant of choice. He reveals this tension by attempting to define free will by fate: "Perhaps, in similar fashion, as spirit is only the smallest infinitesimal substance, the good is only the most subtle evolution of evil, so, perhaps, free will is nothing but the highest potency of fate" ("Fate and History" 15). Here, Nietzsche recognizes free will, seeming to contradict his earlier passionate defense of fate. Nietzsche's basis for free will stems

from his description of the Übermensch, or the superman, a man who excels in achieving self-actualization and freedom. The Übermensch possesses a strong will, enabling him to progress to higher liberated states as he exercises his "will to power." Nietzsche describes future philosophers as this type of man:

> After all that has been said, must I still make a special point of mentioning that they too will be free, *very* free spirits, these philosophers of the future – just as surely as they will not be free spirits merely, but something more, higher, greater, and fundamentally different, something that would not go unrecognized or misidentified? (*Beyond* 40)

These men evolve into free spirits by exercising their wills, thrusting themselves above other humans in achieving human potential. Grillaert points out that by defining free will as earned by those who exert their strong wills, "the concept of an 'unfree will' is 'mythological': in reality it is only a matter of 'strong and weak wills' […] The problem of determinism and free will is here reduced to a mere gradual differentiation between strong and weak wills. With the same pertinacity that he refutes the concept of free will, Nietzsche undermines the idea of determinism" (46-7). Nietzsche claims that, to a certain extent, humans retain free will, free will that depends on the action of a strong will, for "only a very few people can be independent: it is a prerogative of the strong" (*Beyond* 30). Although allowing for free will exercised by those with strong wills, Nietzsche still relegates most of humanity to fate's whim, and he recognizes this outcome, finally explaining how he perceives a balance between fate and free will:

> But if fate, as a limit-determination, still seems more powerful than free will, there are two things we should not forget: first, that fate is only an abstract concept, a force without matter; that for the individual there is only an individual

> fate; that fate is nothing else but a chain of events; that man, as soon as he acts, creates his own events, determines his own fate; that, in general, events, insofar as they affect him, are, consciously or unconsciously, brought about by himself and must suit him. ("Freedom of Will and Fate" 16)

By defining fate as individual, Nietzsche comes to the crux of his theory.

To reconcile his two seemingly contradictory arguments for and against both free will and fatalism, Nietzsche merges his positions, resulting in an ultimate assertion that free will is attainable within the limits of personal fate. By accepting and loving a personal fate, he asserts, each individual embraces her own destiny, calling it hers and acting within the limitations that she has now freely and purposefully chosen. Robert Solomon explains Nietzsche's theory: "one has predetermined and limited possibilities – one's talents, abilities, capacities, disabilities, limitations […] But it is perfectly obvious that these promising possibilities are no more than that, that they require development, encouragement, training, practice, and dedication" (72). By acknowledging our talents and limitations, therefore, we may choose to cultivate our talents to attain our highest potentials, thereby enacting our free wills. Grillaert understands Nietzsche's idea as an attainable free will – a free will won by accepting the self and its characteristics then triumphing through those same characteristics (56). This combination of fate and free will results in a balance that can greatly improve the individual's life: "The individual must decide to what extent he allows fate to prevail in his personal destiny; man has to find for himself a balance between absolute freedom of will, on the one hand, which would make him a god, or fatalism, on the other hand, which would make him an automation […] Although man is determined, he himself is the final creator of his own life" (Grillaert 53). Therefore, as Nietzsche asserts, fate and free will are compatible aspects that blend in the Übermensch, allowing him to attain true

greatness. Strong wills may reach their fullest potential within the limits that their fates impose upon them. Nietzsche explains this potential:

> *Freedom of will*, in itself nothing but freedom of thought, is also circumscribed in a similar way as is freedom of thought. Thoughts cannot go beyond the boundary of the circle of ideas. But the circle of ideas is based upon mastered intuitions that can, with amplification, grow and become stronger without going beyond the limits determined by the brain. Likewise, freedom of will is capable of enhancement within the limits of the same farthest point. It is another matter to put the will to work. The capacity for this is dispensed to us in a fatalistic way. ("Freedom of Will and Fate" 16)

Our lives remain inscribed by fate, according to Nietzsche's theory. But he does provide us some liberation from this prison by allowing those of us with strong wills the choice to exert ourselves to attain our potentials and to excel above our peers. This theory recognizes fate's stronger influence over human life, but the inequality recognized between fate and free will serves our purposes in shedding light on fate and free will's presences in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

Chapter 3: *Harry Potter*: A Story of Strong Wills

Nietzsche's theory illuminates the influences of fate and free will in the *Harry Potter* series as it allows acceptance of both forces working concurrently on particular individuals. I have previously examined both fate's and free will's definitive presences in Harry's world. By closely considering some of Rowling's main characters independently, we may discover exactly how fate and free will balance each other.

As the series' title character, Harry Potter offers the best specimen for such scrutiny. Harry recognizes and trusts fate's power, as discussed above. If born fated to a certain determined path, as he believes and as many aspects of his life illustrate, does Harry ever exhibit choice? He does so repeatedly. For instance, in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Harry and Ron find Hermione trapped by a rampaging troll in a Hogwarts bathroom. Although safe in an outside corridor, the two boys decide to enter the bathroom to save Hermione: "It was the last thing they wanted to do, but what choice did they have?" (175). Harry and Ron do not want to fight a troll, but they make a decision – they choose – to help their friend. Again, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry finds himself in a situation where he must force himself to act heroically. Once Harry realizes that Ginny Weasly is trapped by a basilisk in the Chamber, he decides he must enter the Chamber to save her: "Harry heard Ron gasp and looked again. He had made up his mind what he was going to do. 'I'm going down there,' he said" (300-1). Harry repeatedly makes choices to enter unfavorable situations. When Harry decides to pursue Ginny, Ron and Hermione argue against his decision, but Harry stands firm, thinking, "They were wasting time. Ginny had already been in the Chamber of Secrets for hours…Harry knew there was only one thing to do" (304). Fate may ordain that Harry stumble into these opportunities for heroism, but Harry clearly decides each time to act upon the opportunity. We could also argue

that fate determines Harry's personality, driving him to accept heroic tasks, but the two examples above show Harry working directly against his instincts. Each time, Harry experiences fear and the desire to escape, but he works against his biological tendencies, mentally forcing himself to make difficult decisions. Another example of Harry's free choice occurs in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* once Harry believes that Voldemort possesses him: "A leaden sensation was settling into the pit of his stomach. He had no alternative: He was going to have to return to Privet Drive, cut himself off from other wizards entirely" (494). Once again, Harry's conciense moves him to act heroically against his wishes, resigning himself to a dislikeable option. Fate has no hand in this choice.

Nietzsche's philosophy illuminates the *Harry Potter* series through scenes such as these, which help readers understand the characters' true identities and the fatalism and free will under which their world functions. When considering how Nietzsche's theory on fate and free will functions in Harry Potter's world, readers may notice that Rowling's story revolves around a group of particularly strong-willed wizards. For instance, James Smith encourages scholars to consider the *Harry Potter* books from a perspective that understands fate as determined by character: "Instead of thinking about individual future acts, we should consider the future in terms of an *inevitability of character* […] I'm making a prediction based on the kind of person I know [him or her] to be" (par.15). As Nietzsche argues, strong-willed people may embrace their fates, thereby exercising their free wills to the fullest extent within fate's boundaries; Rowling's characters excel in the same way. With this understanding, according to Smith, prophecies foretell future events dependent on the person they concern. By understanding Harry's personality, the unknown force speaking through seers makes a prophecy that accurately predicts Harry's free choices as circumscribed by his fate. Smith explains, "If the prophecy foresees this

battle of good vs. evil, this could be understood as an affirmation of Harry's character: that his confrontation with Voldemort is just what we would expect from someone with Harry's virtues" (par.17). Rather than considering the prophecy as a controlling force, we may consider the prophecy as illustrative of the personality we understand Harry to possess. Internet writer Matril offers doubt regarding the prophecy's influence over Harry's life; Matril argues that, although the prophecy may foretell truth, it speaks in knowledge of the free choices that Harry and Voldemort will make. With this understanding, "a future event of choice may determine what is prophesied, rather than the other way around" (Matril par.6). Here, Matril argues that prophecies foretell outcomes, rather than the choices that necessitate the outcome – the definition of fatalism. Just as Oedipus's knowledge of his fate leads him to fulfill it, so Harry finds that he can not escape his own destiny. Matril's claim recognizes that fate demonstrates a greater strength than does free will in Harry's world, but Matril does not dismiss the importance of Harry's freedom to choose: "It is not [Harry Potter's] passive fate to fulfill the prophecy, but his deliberate choice" (par.9). Internet contributor Jurgan agrees with this reading, claiming that, "[the prophecy] was not true because of some incomprehensible hand of fate hovering over them, but rather it was based on simple extrapolations from the subjects' characters, and the fact that they knew about the prophecy" (par.5). Fate's influence works in two directions then – the prophecy influences the subjects to act based on their knowledge and faith in the prediction, and the subjects influence the prophecy with personalities from which certain actions may be predicted. For Harry, while he submits to fate and follows his course, he partially does so because he knows there exists a defined course. Although naturally brave, Harry feels much less responsible for Voldemort's actions before learning of the prophecy than he does later. The first four books of the series convey a much lighter, more playful tone before Cedric's death and

Harry's introduction to the prophecy. Attempting to absorb the news of his foretold future, Harry thinks, "An invisible barrier separated him from the rest of the world. He was – he had always been – a marked man. It was just that he had never really understood what that meant" (*Order of the Phoenix* 856). Knowing his destiny does not change his path, but knowing does help him along it. Therefore, as the scholar John Granger argues, the "choices we make both reflect the character we have and shape the character we will have" (75). Harry embraces his fate. Rather than avoid dangerous situations, Harry accepts his circumstances.

Harry acts partially from a sense of social responsibility and resignation triggered by the prophecy, but at the same time, he works to improve himself within fate's boundaries, growing stronger and wiser to fulfill his fate more completely. For instance, in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry leads a Defense Against the Dark Arts club, named Dumbledore's Army. Through the club, he instructs other students in defensive magic, preparing them to encounter Voldemort and his Death Eaters. In this way, not only does Harry himself practice spells and charms, following the path fate has provided, but he also builds a group of skillful students with whom to fight, as proves helpful in the action of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and in the final battle against Voldemort in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. By accepting his fate and working to improve himself within its boundaries, Harry excels. Although not overly gifted in every aspect, for Harry does represent the "average" teenager, adults lead him to recognize his strengths and to use them to his advantage. He demonstrates this recognition when, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry passes a number of tests as a Hogwarts champion in the Tri-Wizard Tournament. When discussing how to survive stealing an egg from an Hungarian Horntail dragon, one of Harry's professors coaches him to "*play to your strengths*" (344). When Harry remembers his talent at flying, he summons his broom and successfully

outmaneuvers the dragon. Harry is brave, but he does not enjoy endless talent, which would unquestionably define him as a natural enemy to Voldemort. Even as a teenager, however, Harry is special because he finds a balance between fate and free will. His strength derives from accepting his fate, embracing it, and triumphing through it. This balance prepares him to exceed his peers and to mature into a worthy opponent.

Neville Longbottom represents another such character demonstrating this balance, embracing fate and succeeding through will. The first books of the *Harry Potter* series characterize Neville as a clumsy, inept young wizard present only for comic relief, but Neville matures throughout the story to embody Nietzsche's strong-willed man, independent and accepting of fate by the time of the final battle against Voldemort. Readers first meet Neville with Harry on platform nine and three-quarters as Harry begins his first journey to Hogwarts. As Harry searches for a seat aboard the Hogwarts Express, "He passed a round-faced boy who was saying, 'Gran, I've lost my toad again.' 'Oh, *Neville*,' he heard the old woman sigh" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 94). Readers' first impression of Neville characterizes him as a forgetful, incompetent youth whose *grandmother* even loses patience with him. This characterization intensifies through *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. In book three, Snape vocalizes Neville's humiliating incapabilities as he remarks on Remus Lupin's Defense Against the Dark Arts class: "At the doorway [Snape] turned on his heel and said, 'Possibly no one's warned you, Lupin, but this class contains Neville Longbottom. I would advise you not to entrust him with anything difficult. Not unless Miss Granger is hissing instructions in his ear'" (132). Although Neville's friends defend him, even they seem to pity him. Harry does not respect or recognize Neville's strengths until, following the disastrous final challenge in the Tri-Wizard Tournament, he learns of Neville's parents' demise. Once

Dumbledore explains that "the Longbottoms were very popular" and that they now "are insane […] in St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries" after the Death Eaters tortured them for information, Harry realizes that "he had never known…never, in four years, bothered to find out" about Neville's history (603). Neville's unremarkable reputation never incited interest in his past or parentage, but with his heritage revealed, Neville claims a larger role in the *Harry Potter* books.

Neville reveals his potential in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* when he accompanies Harry and other Dumbledore's Army members to the Ministry of Magic where they encounter powerful Death Eaters. By the time the wizards committed to opposing Voldemort and his followers, the Order of the Phoenix, arrive to save the students, "Harry and Neville were now the only two left fighting the five Death Eaters, two of whom sent streams of silver light like arrows past them that left craters in the wall behind them" (798). The other members of Harry's party fall, injured, but Neville demonstrates a strength and determination comparable to Harry's as the two provide the only lasting resilience against Voldemort's followers. Later, Professor McGonagall compliments Neville's newfound bravery by admonishing his grandmother's low expectations: "'Hmph,' snorted Professor McGonagall. 'It's high time your grandmother learned to be proud of the grandson she's got, rather than the one she thinks she ought of have – particularly after what happened at the Ministry'" (*Half-Blood* 174). Although it takes Neville longer than Harry to exhibit a strong will, readers finally recognize Neville as an important character, one who might have played Harry's role had Voldemort chosen him as the prophesied one. While informing Harry of Professor Trelawney's prophecy, Dumbledore admits that the prophecy could have referred to Neville instead of Harry:

> "The odd thing is, Harry," [Dumbledore] said softly, "that [the prophecy] may not

> have meant you at all. Sibyll's prophecy could have applied to two wizard boys, both born at the end of July that year, both of whom had parents in the Order of the Phoenix, both sets of parents having narrowly escaped Voldemort three times. One, of course, was you. The other was Neville Longbottom." (*Order of the Phoenix* 842)

As Harry then realizes, "Neville's childhood had been blighted by Voldemort just as much as Harry's had, but Neville had no idea how close he had come to having Harry's destiny. The prophecy could have referred to either of them, yet, for his own inscrutable reasons, Voldemort had chosen to believe that Harry was the one meant" (*Half-Blood* 139). The prophecy could also easily explain Neville's slower maturity, for where Harry found himself famous and expected to perform heroic feats at a young age, Neville never experiences this social and political pressure. His growth therefore takes a more natural pace as his will strengthens, quietly unnoticed by others. By the final book, however, Neville's strong will emerges as he leads the DA and the Hogwarts students in Harry's absence. Once Harry and Neville reunite in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry chastises Neville for endangering himself while bravely rebelling against the Death Eaters' presence at Hogwarts. But Neville passionately responds, "'You didn't hear [Alecto Carrow],' said Neville. 'You wouldn't have stood it either. The thing is, it helps when people stand up to them, it gives everyone hope. I used to notice that when you did it, Harry'" (574). Neville follows Harry's example, exhibiting strength and fulfilling his potential while remaining circumscribed by his fate. Neville finally reveals the strength of his will as he accomplishes one of the most triumphant successes in the final book:

> In one swift, fluid motion, Neville broke free of the Body-Bind Curse upon him; the flaming hat fell off him and he drew from its depths something silver, with a

> glittering, rubied handle – The slash of the silver blade could not be heard over the roar of the oncoming crowd or the sounds of the clashing giants or of the stampeding centaurs, and yet it seemed to draw every eye. With a single stroke Neville sliced off the great snake's head, which spun high into the air, gleaming in the light flooding from the entrance hall, and Voldemort's mouth was open in a scream of fury that nobody could hear, and the snake's body thudded to the ground at his feet. (*Deathly* 733)

For having destroyed the last surviving (and arguably most strongly guarded) Horcrux, Voldemort's pet snake, Neville takes his rightful place among Rowling's strong-willed heroes. Besides the bravery required to slay Voldemort's Horcrux, Neville demonstrates amazing strength in breaking, by pure strength of will, a curse that Voldemort had inflicted. Never before in the series has a character escaped a curse by his own strength. For the first time, Neville's determination, desire, and will overpower magic – here, Voldemort's magic. Just as the *Harry Potter* novels document Harry's progression through acceptance of his fate and fulfillment of his potential, the story also documents a second character, Neville, maturing into Nietzsche's superman as well.

Where Harry and Neville serve as the characters whose very progress serves as the narrative's subject, Dumbledore and Voldemort serve as two characters who have already achieved their potentials. Dumbledore, as discussed above, accepts fate's power and works to guide others to success within the boundaries that fate prescribes. Ron realizes this quality of Dumbledore's when he discovers the true use of the Deluminator left to him in Dumbledore's will: "'[Dumbledore] knew what he was doing when he gave me the Deluminator, didn't he? He – well,' Ron's ears turned bright red and he became engrossed in a tuft of grass at his feet, which

he prodded with his toe, 'he must've known I'd run out on you'" (*Deathly Hallows* 391). Dumbledore has grown so familiar with fate's mechanisms that he can now predict outcomes, based on individuals' personalities. This familiarity with fate sometimes leads other characters to believe that Dumbledore may control fate. For instance, when Wormtail dies by his own silver hand, Harry remembers Dumbledore's assurance two years earlier that Wormtail's survival and escape may one day benefit Harry, for "the time may come when [Harry] will be very glad [he] saved Pettigrew's life" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 427). After discovering Pettigrew's treachery in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry convinces Lupin and Sirius to spare Pettigrew. Dumbledore supports Harry's decision, and, once Dumbledore's prediction of Pettigrew's usefulness proves true, Harry wonders how much power Dumbledore wields: "[Harry] thought of Wormtail, dead because of one small unconscious impulse of mercy…Dumbledore had foreseen that… How much more had he known?" (*Deathly Hallows* 479). It turns out that Dumbledore knew quite a lot, but not because he controlled anyone's destiny. Instead, he works with fate to predict from personality, in this case, Peter Pettigrew's personality and his personal debt to Harry. Dumbledore understands that free will, as explained by scholar Nel Grillaert in articulating Nietzsche's concepts, "means the power both to accept and transcend one's fate, to continually create and re-create oneself [….] Free will is not an *a priori* faculty inherent in humankind – as outlined in most metaphysical conceptions – but rather is an attainable ideal that can be acquired in a process of overcoming oneself" (Grillaert 56-7). Dumbledore never attempts to circumvent fate; he guides Harry along the prophecy's path throughout the seven novels. What he does with his intimate understanding of fate's behavior is to exert his own will as strongly as possible to help others achieve their potentials. Dumbledore, in all his wisdom and experience, most fully understands the roles of fate and free will in his own world as explained by Nietzsche.

Voldemort, on the other hand, presents readers with a character who, although recognizing fate and exceeding in magical and intellectual potential, misunderstands fate's consequences and fails because of his lack of respect for fate. As mentioned above, Voldemort believes himself strong enough to break through fate's limitations, but his over-confidence dooms him. Voldemort's ego convinces him that he controls power never wielded by another mortal, a power that even fate can not overcome. But by failing to respect that some forces will always remain more powerful than himself, Voldemort falls to hubris. Voldemort exhibits this deadly flaw as he approaches the Potter house with the intent to exterminate the family: "*And he was gliding along, that sense of purpose and power and rightness in him that he always knew on these occasions…Not anger…that was for weaker souls than he..but triumph, yes*" (*Deathly Hallows* 343). Voldemort possesses a strong will, here described as a strong soul, that assists him in excelling, but his "purpose and power and rightness" compromise his talent in his proclivity toward evil. Voldemort fails to embody Nietzsche's superman: "The greatest person should be the one who can be most lonely, most hidden, most deviant, the man beyond good and evil, the master of his virtues, abundantly rich in will" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 107). In addition, Voldemort's goal of killing Harry originates in his incomplete understanding of Professor Trelawney's prophecy. He recognizes fate's power enough to determine that he must kill the child foretold to oppose him, but Voldemort believes himself capable of changing fate. His ignorance of fate's power actually strengthens Harry by providing him with his mother's sacrificial protection and by forging a lasting connection between Harry and Voldemort. By pursuing Harry and his family, Voldemort inadvertently transfers some of his power to baby Harry during his vicious attack. Voldemort's attempt to bypass fate only furthers its inevitability and strengthens his enemy.

Although Harry, Neville, Dumbledore, Voldemort, and a few other main characters demonstrate Nietzsche's strong-willed men, not all characters are blessed with free will. As determined above, most of Rowling's world turns under fate's influence; only certain characters, the main characters of Rowling's story, introduce the exceptions of freedom. Rowling appears to balance fate and free will in her fiction: fate determines futures, but characters can exercise free will within fate's paths. Rowling has created a story, therefore, that focuses on these few individuals who exhibit strong wills, rise above their peers, and create themselves through their strengths. Although many critics praise the *Harry Potter* series for its identifiable hero – the boy in whom every reader can find herself – Rowling actually offers her readers an exceptional hero. It appears that Rowling champions choice upon first reading, but with examination, one sees that Harry's world remains unexpectedly at fate's mercy. Harry excels because he has a strong will with which he makes choices that propel him above his peers, beyond a staid and determined fate. The *Harry Potter* series is a story of the exceptional.

Chapter 4: *Harry Potter*'s Authority

If fate regulates most wizards' lives in Harry Potter's world, then Rowling leaves readers wondering, who or what determines fate? Does an authority – God, the universe, some other powerful force or being – preside over the characters? Several aspects of Rowling's novels entice readers to consider this question of authority. For instance, as discussed above, prediction plays an important role in the story's action. Centaurs ponder the stars for greater understanding of the future; they consider astrology an important and difficult art that even they have trouble deciphering at times. The Centaur Firenze teaches his Hogwarts students to "observe the heavens. Here is written, for those who can see, the fortune of our races […] Centaurs have unraveled the mysteries of these movements over centuries. Our findings teach us that the future may be glimpsed in the sky above us […] We watch the skies for the great tides of evil or change that are sometimes marked there. It may take ten years to be sure of what we are seeing" (*Order* 602, 3). The Centaurs' art leaves Hogwarts students and readers wondering, what does the universe reflect? Who guides the stars to reveal future events, and into what power do prophecies tap?

Professor Trelawney explores other avenues of fortune-telling, including tea leaves, palm reading, and crystal balls. Although Trelawney rarely offers valuable insight into fate's plans, and although students such as Hermione believe that Divination "is such a waste of time," Dumbledore and the Ministry of Magic clearly respect Divination enough to offer it as a class to all Hogwarts students (*Prisoner* 297).[1] Again, this class leaves readers asking, is divination a true and reliable art? Where does this magic originate, and who provides the answers to the wizards' questions?

The scenes of death and grieving constitute the most important scenes in the *Harry Potter* novels, leaving room for readers to question further the series' authority along with the characters. As several of Harry's closest friends and family members pass away during his seventeen years, Harry wonders where these characters have gone. Does Dumbledore live on in another place? Where did Sirius find himself after falling behind the veil? Rowling explains that these questions reveal how "Death is an extremely important theme throughout all seven books. I would say possibly the most important theme" (Thøgersen par. 111). Readers may recognize this importance as Harry loses one relationship after another, striving to understand death – the ultimate hand of fate -- over and over again. Rowling leads readers to grapple with these same existential questions as she records Harry's struggle to grasp the meaning and finality of death: "As his closing attempts in *Order of the Phoenix* to make contact with his dead godfather indicate, [Harry is] now wrestling with questions of whether the dead live on – and what's 'beyond the veil'" (Smith par. 18). But however often Harry faces loss, grief, and confusion, Rowling never provides him or readers a definitive description of life after death. While Harry wishes desperately for Dumbledore's guidance in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, he realizes that, "Dumbledore, like Mad-Eye, like Sirius, like his parents, like his poor owl, all were gone where Harry could never talk to them again" (84). Harry encounters manifestations of his parents once in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and again in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* where Lupin and Sirius join them, but these ghostly apparitions appear for a specific purpose: to help Harry through especially difficult trials. Their brief presences prepare Harry for his task, but they do not fulfill him emotionally. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,* Dumbledore explains these figures: "'No spell can reawaken the dead,' said Dumbledore heavily. 'All that would have happened is a kind of reverse echo. A shadow of the living'" (697-

8). With this explanation, Harry believes that he can not reunite with deceased loved ones in this life, but he infers a hope that they somehow live on. Harry reiterates this theory more clearly when Ron verbalizes his half-hopeful desire that Dumbledore continues to guide Harry, Ron, and Hermione in their search for Horcruxes. Harry assures his friends, "'Dumbledore wouldn't come back as a ghost,' said Harry. There was little about Dumbledore he was sure of now, but he knew that much. 'He would have gone on'" (*Deathly Hallows* 504).

Rowling leaves readers with even more questions concerning the afterlife through the portraits of past headmasters, hanging in the Hogwarts headmaster's office. And from Harry's first trip through Hogwart's halls, readers find that "the people in the portraits along the corridors whispered and pointed as they passed" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 128). Rowling never explains, however, whether these portraits depict once-living characters or whether they are paintings enchanted into animation. Once Harry enters Dumbledore's office for the first time and sees the portraits of the deceased Hogwarts headmasters, readers then might assume that the moving portraits do depict real wizards and provide some sort of connection to the afterlife. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Dumbledore asks two of the headmasters to gather information by moving into various portraits of themselves, located in different places. He explains, "[these two headmasters'] renown is such that both have portraits hanging in other important Wizarding institutions. As they are free to move between their own portraits they can tell us what may be happening elsewhere" (469). Harry learns that portraits hang in the headmaster's office for the purpose of assisting the current headmaster. When one of the deceased headmasters refuses Dumbledore's request to visit another of his portraits, another cries, "We are honor-bound to give service to the present Headmaster of Hogwarts!" (*Order* 473). Furthermore, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry learns that the deceased

Dumbledore, through his portrait, has continued advising Snape, once again revealing the portraits' bridge into the afterlife. But this magical phenomenon raises only more questions that Rowling fails to answer in her text. Do the deceased's souls reside in the portraits? Do the deceased live on in some other place but simultaneously speak through their portraits when needed? Rowling never offers readers this information, and the portraits, although clearly linked to an afterlife, remain one of the mysteries that we as readers must consider magic we may never understand.

Rowling offers readers a single glimpse into a physical afterlife in Harry's brief conversation with Dumbledore in *the Deathly Hallows*. In this episode, Harry and Dumbledore reunite in an ethereal King's Cross Train Station, a seeming way station between the physical world and the afterlife, following Harry's sacrificial encounter with Voldemort. There, it appears that Dumbledore's and Harry's souls meet, as readers later find that Harry's physical body remained on earth during this encounter. But even here Dumbledore evades Harry's questions, leaving Harry and his readers still uncertain as to the characteristics of an afterlife or the authority reigning over these two worlds.

Rowling's focus on human souls provides yet another clue to the possibility of an afterlife in the *Harry Potter* series. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Harry learns of Horcruxes, objects in which strong wizards may store parts of their souls. Professor Slughorn explains to young Voldemort, "'A Horcrux is the word used for an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul […] you split your soul, you see,' said Slughorn, 'and hide part of it in an object outside your body. Then, even if one's body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged'" (497). After learning of this dark magic, Voldemort creates seven Horcruxes, becoming the first wizard to split his soul more than

once. For this reason, he remains extremely difficult to kill, and Harry spends his time in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* searching for and destroying each Horcrux before finally facing Voldemort's physical body. Interestingly for our discussion, though, through Voldemort's creation of Horcruxes, Rowling creates a delineation between the physical body and the spiritual soul. As Slughorn explains, with a Horcrux, a wizard's soul "remains earthbound" when his physical body dies, implying the existence of an afterlife for most other wizards' souls. With this delineation between body and soul, Rowling provides readers room to consider the soul's continued existence following the body's physical death.

To complicate matters, Rowling counterbalances these clues in support of an afterlife by creating the Deathly Hallows: "*Three objects, or Hallows, which, if united, will make the possessor master of Death…Master…Conqueror…Vanquisher…The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*" (*Deathly Hallows* 429). The uniting of the hallows thus allows the wizard to conquer death. Does this desire in the wizarding world to conquer death originate in a natural, a Muggle-world, attempt to extend life for as long as possible, or does this desire reflect the uncertainty of an afterlife? This ambiguity may be explained by Rowling's own indecisiveness in her personal beliefs. In an interview, Rowling admits, "On any given moment if you asked me if I believe in life after death, I think if you polled me regularly through the week, I think I would come down on the side of yes – that I do believe in life after death. But it's something that I wrestle with a lot. It preoccupies me a lot, and I think that's very obvious within the books" (Adler par.16). This preoccupation clearly appears in her writing, and perhaps because of this, readers never receive a clear answer on the presence of an authority or the possibility of an afterlife in the *Harry Potter* series.

According to Nietzsche's theory on fate, a specific authority does not have to exist for fate to remain in control of human life. This theory depends on the aforementioned difference between determinism and fatalism. Robert Solomon explains, "Nietzsche […] talks sometimes of fate […] but really refers only to fatalism. That is, he urges us to appreciate the necessity and significance of outcomes without reference to any mysterious agency […] One might say that, for Nietzsche, character *is* agency and thus embodies both freedom and necessity" (70). For Nietzsche's theory, there need exist no authority, and in this regard, Nietzsche's philosophy is well-suited to Rowling's text. For fate to direct Harry's world, no particular authority need be named, according to Nietzsche. And Edmund Kern agrees that this authoritative absence does not remove responsibility from the characters: "Rowling's characters thus try to assess competing desires and recognize the importance of doing the right thing. Although they rely upon no clearly available divine or objective standards in making their choices, they intuit that the absence of such standards does not allow them to avoid responsibility" (38). Where Nietzsche and Kern argue that the absence of authority does not limit fate's impact on Harry's world, James Smith disagrees, wondering, "By what mechanism or power do seers foretell the future? […] It is this sense of transcendence that marks the difference between the worlds of Harry Potter and Jeremiah. Because there seems to be no divine standpoint in the universe created by Rowling, all prophecy is only divination" (2). Smith's argument reveals a possible flaw in Rowling's text. When compared to such authorities as Jeremiah's Biblical God, what credibility does Professor Trelawney's prophecy retain?

Does J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series suffer from a creative flaw by failing to resolve this ambiguity? If Rowling created a world in which fate dominates, embraced and then plied by only a few strong-willed characters, then failed to provide a necessary authority in control of this

power, does her series stand up to deep analysis, or does it suffer from Rowling's personal indecisiveness? On the other hand, may we apply Nietzsche's philosophy to Rowling's text and argue that no authority need manipulate fate for it to remain a viable force in her fictitious creation? Each argument may be supported by text convincingly. Where many worlds created for young adult readers offer flawlessly constructed universes, other texts leave questions for readers to answer on a personal level. Rowling's novels encourage their audiences to develop personal theories and to use the texts as springboards from which to engage in their own philosophical explorations. However, it remains infelicitious that, by choosing not to provide readers and characters with an undeniable divine authority, Rowling creates a gap between fate's control and the power behind this control. Readers must decide whether they believe this power necessary for their personal interpretations and appreciation of the text.

Conclusion

As many books for young audiences treat pertinent themes, so does the *Harry Potter* series address such topics as death, loss, and the afterlife that are important in children's maturity. Rowling's books go beyond these discussions, however, in broaching the deeply philosophical theme of fate and free will as they influence personal destiny and choice. By considering such theories, Rowling's texts encourage analysis from scholarly perspectives, carving a place for her contribution among classical texts that have long pondered the powers of fate and free will. In the conference setting, children's literature scholars have casually discussed the novels' progression from entertaining young adult books to serious, complicated texts as somehow mirroring Rowling's own authorial maturity as she worked her way through her first published writing, and this progression appears again applicable to the series' treatment of fate and free will.

Some literary scholars, such as Amanda Cockrell, Katherine Grimes, Maria Nikolajeva, and Benoît Virole, argue over the *Harry Potter* series' classification as fairy tale or myth. This classification remains important, for the genre conventions attributed to each illuminate the text's literary goals and nature. Farah Mendlesohn believes that Rowling purposefully includes fairy tale genre conventions when writing Harry's story: "In this [fairy tale] tradition, leadership is intrinsic, heroism born in the blood, and self-interest simply the manifestation of those powers that ensure a return to order. It is this structure that is encoded throughout the Potter texts" (160). According to Mendlesohn, if Harry represents a fairytale hero, then he was born heroic, fated to accomplish heroic deeds. Katherine Grimes agrees that younger children read the *Harry Potter* series as a fairytale, recognizing many fairytale motifs:

> For young children, the Harry Potter books work like fairy tales. They are set in a

> magical world, with evil characters such as Voldemort and good ones such as Albus Dumbledore. There are even mermaids, dragons, unicorns, trolls, orphans, and witches. Thus, youngsters recognize the books as part of the fairy tale world and Harry as a fairy or folk tale hero, like young Jack, who might break a few rules but is basically good and resourceful, allowing him to triumph in the end of every book. (Grimes 91)

There certainly exist within the series numerous borrowed themes from the fairytale tradition. Matthew Dickerson, author of *From Homer to Harry Potter: A Handbook on Myth and Fantasy*, argues that the "fairy tale usually has a very narrow geographic scope of a single village or wood" (Dickerson 27). The first four *Harry Potter* books follow this model as the majority of the books take place solely on Hogwarts grounds. Trouble finds Harry in his own home, and he only ventures into the surrounding woods and village. Many aspects of Rowling's novels incorporate fairytale conventions and motifs. Following *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*'s publication in 2000, Grimes predicted that, at the end of the series,

> if J.K. Rowling follows the path set forth by tellers of fairy tales, Harry will become "king," or at least be on his way to becoming headmaster. He might have prospects of marriage to a woman who is equally wonderful, the fairy tale princess to match his role as fairy tale hero. If the series ends like a fairy tale, Voldemort will be defeated, probably killed by Harry's hand. Harry will save the kingdom represented by Hogwarts from the evil represented by Voldemort, as Jack defeats the ogre or giant, and Harry will be rewarded by Dumbledore, who represents the king. (121)

Deathly Hallows fulfills Grimes' prediction with Harry's marriage to Ginny and his defeat over Voldemort and subsequent protection of Hogwarts. Therefore, it appears that *Harry Potter* fits into the fairytale genre in several aspects, and Harry's life then parallels those of the fairytale heroes. In the first four books, however, Harry believes himself to act based on choice rather than fate, contradicting this fairytale genre. Although unknowingly destined from his first year to battle Voldemort to the death, Harry enjoys the freedom he believes his autonomy allows him. As discussed above, Dumbledore remains a strong guiding hand in Harry's life during his early years at Hogwarts, but Harry fails to recognize fully this guidance, and he acts freely, learning and growing in his decisions.

Following Cedric Diggory's death at the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, several shifts take place in the series. First, the books take on a more serious tone. Death personally enters the child characters' lives, and their worst nightmare, Lord Voldemort, has retaken physical form. Second, Harry now strongly feels himself set apart from his classmates – not just in fame and name, but now in trauma and experience. When Harry then learns of Professor Trelawney's prophecy at the end of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the series moves out of the fairy tale genre and into a mythological quest tale. As Robert Segal describes, "[The hero] is heroic because he rises from obscurity to, typically, the throne. Literally, he is an innocent victim of either his parents, or, ultimately, fate" (ix-x). In the series' last books, Harry comes to embody the mythological hero once he realizes his fate and then works to fulfill that destiny. Joseph Campbell explains that the mythological hero attains specialized knowledge of his enemy by "reappearing from the darkness that is the source of the shapes of the day, brings a knowledge of the secret of the tyrant's doom" (337). As one of the few living to know of Voldemort's Horcruxes, Harry represents this type of hero in *Harry Potter*

and the Deathly Hallows. In addition, the novels move from the localized adventures on Hogwarts grounds to a more global battle against evil. Dickerson points out that "The events of myth are seen not only to affect the rule of a particular realm, but to dramatically affect the whole history of the world" (28). Harry's quest and character continue to increase in importance, not only to his friends and family, but to the entire wizarding community and even to the unsuspecting Muggle community. Voldemort wages a global battle, and Harry remains the single hero capable of defeating this threat.

With this shift from fairy tale to myth comes a shift from choice to fate. Once having believed himself free to make moral decisions and to learn from these choices, Harry realizes in the final books what he deems to be his true destiny and all that depends on his success. More than ever before, Harry's actions follow fate's decree, and by accepting this truth and embracing his fate, Harry comes to embody the classical, mythological hero. This final transformation reaches actualization at the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* once Harry realizes that he must sacrifice himself to Voldemort in order for Voldemort to die:

> Harry understood at last that he was not supposed to survive. His job was to walk calmly into death's welcoming arms. Along the way, he was to dispose of Voldemort's remaining links to life, so that when at last he flung himself across Voldemort's path, and did not raise a wand to defend himself, the end would be clean, and the job that ought to have been done in Godric's Hollow would be finished: Neither would live, neither could survive […] And Dumbledore had known that Harry would not duck out, that he would keep going to the end, even though it was *his* end, because he had taken trouble to get to know him, hadn't he? Dumbledore knew, as Voldemort knew, that Harry would not let anyone else

die for him now that he had discovered it was in his power to stop it. (691, 693)

Harry himself remains as Voldemort's last Horcrux, containing part of Voldemort's own soul within. When Voldemort murdered Harry's parents, part of Voldemort's soul was transferred to Harry, creating an involuntary eighth Horcrux, an act Voldemort himself does not know occurred. With this knowledge, Harry understands that he must die in order for Voldemort to die. This final sacrifice has always constituted part of his fate, and, as Dumbledore knew, Harry embraces even this part. By sacrificing himself as Nietzsche's superman, Harry comes to represent the mythological hero.

As Dickerson explains, "the *meaning* of myth is often much broader than that of fairy story. The best myths reward endless rereading and can be understood at many levels. The simplest of fairy stories, by contrast, may provide endless enjoyment at each retelling, and yet their meaning is much more readily grasped or intuited – imagined, at least, even if not put into the form of a moral" (28). The *Harry Potter* books offer Dickerson's "meaning" to readers by treating such themes as fate and free will. At the same time, Rowling leaves her audience with a Nietzschen moral through Harry's actions: by recognizing personal talents and accepting limitations, readers may embody heroes, reaching to excel within their personal limitations. Harry encourages us to achieve success available to the strong-willed by reaching for our potentials, and the *Harry Potter* series provides readers with a classical myth wrapped in a beautifully imagined children's story.

Notes

Introduction:

[1] To name only a few examples of these critical discussions, see Giselle Liza Anatol, Introduction, *Reading Harry Potter* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2003), ix-xxv; Kathleen F. Malu, "Ways of Reading *Harry Potter*: Multiple Stories for Multiple Reader Identities," *Harry Potter's World*, Elizabeth E. Heilman (New York: Routledge Falmer 2003), 75-95; and Nancy K. Jentsch, "Harry Potter and the Tower of Babel: Translating the Magic," *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, Lana A. Whited (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2002), 285-301.

Chapter 1:

[1] Dumbledore accounts for withholding information by proclaiming a love for Harry and a desire to protect him, encouraging epistemological study of *Harry Potter* (*Order* 834-844). The characters in possession of the most knowledge hold the most power, and Dumbledore's purposeful retention of knowledge points to a specific facet of the relationships between adults and children that Rowling criticizes here.

[2] Catherine and Jack Deavel support this point as they claim that, in the *Harry Potter* series, "If one is born into a given destiny, one cannot hope to act otherwise" (51).

[3] As briefly mentioned above, Flaherty claims that Rowling criticizes adults who withhold information from children, actually using Dumbledore as an example of what not to do: "Dumbledore is the one who believed that it was better to keep the truth from Harry. The fault, he claims, lies in his too-fond heart, which wanted to spare Harry the burden of information. This is in keeping with the tendency among the adults in the book to equate ignorance with safety, believing that children will be kept from harm if they are kept from knowledge. Throughout the book, Rowling demonstrates the flaws in this reasoning. A lack of knowledge does not keep

danger from finding Harry: it only hinders his attempts to defend himself. While knowing that his destiny is to kill or be killed by Voldemort would certainly have caused Harry pain, it is likely that it also would have prevented the battle at the Department of Mysteries and its tragic consequences" (101).

[4] Kakutani points out that Harry resigns himself to his fate, and "often wishes he were not the *de facto* leader of the Resistance movement, shouldering terrifying responsibilities" (2).

Chapter 2:

[1] To clarify these important definitions, Grillaert considers that, "Determinism is the overall philosophical term for several theories that share the belief that for every event there is a condition that necessarily causes the event and excludes all alternative manifestations of this event. If the determining condition occurs, then necessarily the determined event takes place" (46). Solomon then explains, "Fatalism, in contrast to determinism, begins at the end, that is, the outcome, and considers the outcome as in some sense necessary, given the nature of the person's character, which in turn entails a protracted narrative that, all things considered, encompasses the whole of that person's life, culture, and circumstances" (67).

Chapter 3:

[1] Dumbledore describes both Harry and Neville well when he muses, "It is a curious thing, Harry, but perhaps those who are best suited to power are those who have never sought it. Those who, like you, have leadership thrust upon them, and take up the mantle because they must, and find to their own surprise that they wear it well" (*Deathly Hallows* 718).

Chapter 4:

[1] Readers learn little of Divination's history at Hogwarts. We know that Dumbledore interviewed Trelawney for the job before she delivered her all-important prophecy,

demonstrating some respect and desire for a Divination teacher at Hogwarts. But Dumbledore then keeps Trelawney employed because of a single true-seeing experience. We may infer that Dumbledore's retention of Trelawney has more to do with this single prophecy than with his belief in her usefulness as a teacher. This inference can therefore lead us to believe that Dumbledore does not put much faith in prophecy, but Dumbledore then hires Firenze in Trelawney's place as Divination professor. Again, however, it remains unclear whether Dumbledore hires Firenze for his fortune-telling ability or for Firenze's loyalty to the fight against Voldemort and his subsequent abandonment by his herd.

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