



Validating the Status Quo or Valorising Rebelliousness: Analysing J.K.

Rowling's *Harry Potter*

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Abstract:

The theme of rebellion in children's literature is not new. Challenging the establishment has been a staple in children's canon for long – be it fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm or texts of the twenty-first century. The present paper investigates whether J.K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* series, maintains the status quo or valorises rebelliousness in the seven books. In a generic mystery, the child protagonist who refuses to conform is reprimanded by adult authority and the conventional order is restored. In the *Potter* books, on the other hand, the conventional order is thwarted. The key question, therefore, is whether breaking rules is mere derision or is it in response to systemic injustice? It needs to be understood that defiance or rebelliousness in children's texts is not about 'acting out' but rather about how young people perceive power and relate to authority. When anarchy is let loose upon the world, rebelliousness, courage, and daring are the very traits that become the need of the hour.

Keywords: J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter*, institutional authority, wizarding world, conformity, rebelliousness.

When Max in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) steps onto the island "where the wild things are," he is met by wild things that "roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws". Our child protagonist, nevertheless, refuses to cower. He tames them with his "magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once" (Sendak). The frightened wild things declare him to be "the most wild thing of all" and crown him "king of all wild things" (Sendak). This canonical classic in children's literature was the recipient of the prestigious Caldecott Medal in 1964.

Children's literature, it can be claimed, has had a long tradition of child protagonists who subvert established authority. Be it Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) who questions the absurd social mores of Victorian times; Huck Finn from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) who rejects 'civilised' society and rebels against racist thinking prevalent at the time; or *Matilda* (1988), named after the young heroine, who stands up to abusive authoritarianism – these child protagonists invite young readers to challenge conventional modes of thought and to develop a broader perspective. Defiance or rebelliousness in children's texts, therefore, is not about 'acting out' but rather about how young people perceive power and relate to authority.

The *Harry Potter* books (1997-2007), then, further uphold this ongoing tradition. In every single book, Harry and his companions break rules, defy curfew and get into all sorts of scrapes. Hence, there is no denying the fact that they are indeed rebellious. It is worth noting, nonetheless, that they also end up unravelling a mysterious secret. At the heart of each book lies a series of clues that help solve a mystery. In other words, a particular sequence of events, their ensuing investigations and consequent deductions underpin the magical and fantastical setting of Hogwarts, Harry's school. "[T]he real source of mystery at the centre of each of the Harry Potter

novels” [sic], opines Christopher Routledge, “is a detective mystery” (204-205). Although magic is employed, the “underlying method” of the trio is “one of gathering clues and forming theories about ‘whodunit?’” (Routledge 205). A gripping mystery is also part of the appeal in each volume. Moreover, the mysteries are well-rounded, and the clues situated in the previous books lead to, sometimes even add to, a plot twist in the final book(s). Rowling keeps her readers constantly engaged in gathering clues and attempting to solve the mysteries for themselves. Interestingly though, in most mystery genre books, the “long established and hierarchical social structure” is restored, while in the *Potter* books, “such a structure is prevented from reasserting itself” (Routledge 207). Generic mystery stories restore status quo, in *Harry Potter* it is challenged, not just by the protagonist, but collectively, by members of the wizarding community. In a generic mystery, the child protagonist refuses to conform to norms and is consequently reprimanded by adult authority. In the wizarding world, by contrast, it is not just Harry, Hermione or Ron who are non-conformists but other witches and wizards as well.

That notwithstanding, many parents allege that the *Potter* books teach young readers to question authority. Such charges are not far from the truth. Harry and his friends have rebelled time and again. However, what is more intriguing is that students are not the only ones to have dared to stand up to the establishment in the series. Adult witches and wizards have also defied the established codes as and when the need arose. This paper argues that Rowling’s depiction of rebelliousness, defiance, disobedience and resistance in *Harry Potter* is not merely rhetorical, or a moral transgression, but rather a response, individual as well as collective, to a system that is either ineffectual or complicit with corrupt authority. Selective incidents from all seven texts shall be used to establish how different characters respond to this inequity.

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Harry, under threat of expulsion, breaks night-time curfew not for entertainment but to save the Philosopher's Stone from getting into the wrong hands. He rightly believes that Voldemort is trying to get to the Stone, as it can grant immortality. Harry tells his friends: “‘Haven’t you heard what it was like when he was trying to take over? There won’t be any Hogwarts to get expelled from...If I get caught before I can get to the Stone, well, I’ll have to go back to the Dursleys and wait for Voldemort to find me there. It’s only dying a bit later than I would have done, because I’m never going over to the Dark Side’” (*Philosopher* 290). In direct contrast to this is an example of resistance of a different kind. Towards the end of the book, Neville Longbottom—a clumsy, shy and socially awkward fellow Gryffindor—stands up to Harry, Hermione and Ron as they are sneaking out of the Gryffindor common room to thwart Snape and supposedly save the Philosopher's Stone: “‘You can’t go out...you’ll be caught again. Gryffindor will be in even more trouble....I won’t let you do it,’ he said, hurrying to stand in front of the portrait hole. ‘I’ll – I’ll fight you!’” (*Philosopher* 292). If we contend that rebellion or disobedience is only against authority figures, how do we then explain Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts, doling out tie-breaker points to Neville, turning the tide in favour of Gryffindor for the House Cup: “‘There are all kinds of courage,’ said Dumbledore, smiling. ‘It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr Neville Longbottom’” (*Philosopher* 329). Though Ron, Hermione and Harry are awarded points for their resourcefulness and grit in the face of adversity, Dumbledore does not overlook the wherewithal of a seemingly inept and bumbling Neville. Standing up to peer pressure also requires nerve, and the Headmaster’s recognition of Neville’s actions seems to suggest that moral courage must be grounded in independent judgement.

Similarly, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, right at the beginning, a house-elf named Dobby visits Harry at the Dursleys to warn him against going to Hogwarts that year. Dobby tells Harry: “If Harry Potter goes back to Hogwarts, he will be in mortal danger” (*Chamber* 16). A house-elf, it is revealed, serves an ancient wizarding family with absolute loyalty until the day he dies. Regardless of ill-treatment and abuse, there is no escape for a house-elf unless the master sets him free by giving him a piece of clothing. Traditional wizarding families, however, seldom set their house elves free. Dobby is a house-elf of an old wizarding family – the Malfoys. He has been privy to vital information at the Malfoys that the Chamber of Secrets is to be reopened at Hogwarts in the coming school year. Therefore, going against his master’s interests, fully cognisant of the dire consequences, Dobby time and again attempts to save Harry. This in itself is no less than an act of defiance for Dobby. Throughout the book, he keeps physically punishing himself for his gradual shift in allegiance. He cannot openly betray his master, yet he does try to undermine Lucius Malfoy’s plans at every opportunity. In the end, Harry cleverly tricks Malfoy into handing over an old sock to Dobby, thus setting him free.

The third book *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* focusses on Sirius Black, Harry’s godfather, who has escaped the wizarding high security prison of Azkaban. Sirius, the closest friend of Harry’s father, James Potter, has been wrongfully accused of murder. The book begins twelve years after the murders with Sirius now on the run, presumably heading towards Harry at Hogwarts. In the novel, it is revealed that James had three friends while at Hogwarts – Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew. Bitten by a werewolf as a child, every full moon, Lupin would transform. Though he was enrolled at Hogwarts, his transformations were kept strictly confidential under the watchful eye of Dumbledore. However, the three young friends deduce the truth about Lupin’s disappearances every full moon and secretly learn to transform

themselves into Animagi (animal forms) to keep him company. Though all Animagi are to be registered with the Ministry of Magic, they remained unregistered, and as a result, their transformations would continue to go undetected. Their friendship remained strong even as they entered adulthood. However, we learn that Pettigrew passed on secret information to Voldemort, the Dark Lord, which led to the murder of the Potters. Afterwards, Pettigrew, in full public view, accuses Sirius of betraying the Potters and uses a powerful curse to conveniently stage his own death, killing twelve innocent muggles (non-magical people) in the process. Before escaping in Animagus form, he effectively frames Sirius for thirteen murders, including his own. Sirius is thus wrongfully thrown into Azkaban.

Twelve years later, Sirius Black's escape is no less than a bold act of rebellion, for Azkaban is heavily guarded by Dementors – hooded, floating figures that suck the very soul of their victims with a kiss, leaving behind a living corpse bereft of joy. Sirius recounts his experiences of survival at Azkaban as well as his escape:

‘I don't know how I did it...I think the only reason I never lost my mind is that I knew I was innocent. That wasn't a happy thought, so the Dementors couldn't suck it out of me ... but it kept me sane and knowing who I am ... helped me keep my powers ... so when it all became ... too much ... I could transform in my cell ... become a dog. Dementors can't see, you know They feel their way toward people by feeding off their emotions ... they could tell that my feelings were less – less human, less complex when I was a dog ... but they thought, of course, that I was losing my mind like everyone else in there, so it didn't trouble them. But I was weak, very weak, and I had no hope of driving them away from me without a wand ...’ (*Azkaban* 393-394)

However, it was a picture of Peter Pettigrew transformed as Ron's pet rat that stirred him into action: "I realized he [Peter] was at Hogwarts with Harry ... perfectly positioned to act, if one hint reached his ears that the Dark Side was gathering strength again [he would be] ready to strike at the moment he could be sure of allies ... and to deliver the last Potter to them." [sic] (*Azkaban* 394). It was as if his mind burned with new purpose now to somehow get to Harry to protect him since Sirius was "the only one who knew Peter was still alive" (*Azkaban* 394). He transformed into his Animagus form and made his escape.

One of the most significant acts of rebellion in this book is Sirius Black's escape from prison. Though falsely implicated, and imprisoned without trial, he remains in prison for as many years until he discovers that Pettigrew is alive and in proximity to Harry. He breaks free from Azkaban not for personal freedom but in order to keep his godson safe. His act of defiance is motivated by his fierce loyalty to James and Lily Potter, concern for Harry and the deep desire to expose Pettigrew. Sirius's wrongful implication, without a doubt, exposes a systemic injustice. More importantly, his subsequent escape from Azkaban also lays bare institutional failure on part of the Ministry of Magic. Rowling appears to indicate that rebellion can be ethical when institutions become unjust or when those in authority appear blind to the truth.

Later in the book, Sirius is caught on Hogwarts grounds and the Ministry officially sanctions the Dementors to perform a kiss on him. Harry's and Hermione's repeated attempts to bring the truth to light are trivialised and go unheard by Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic. It is only their Headmaster who can decipher the truth accurately, yet his hands appear tied as he states:

'There is not a shred of proof to support Black's story, except your word – and the word of two thirteen-year-old wizards will not convince anybody. A street full of

eyewitnesses swore they saw Sirius murder Pettigrew I have no power to make other men see the truth, or to overrule the Minister for Magic What we need [therefore] ... is more *time*.' [sic] (*Azkaban* 416-417)

The reader, along with Harry, learns that Hermione has been using a Time-Turner throughout the year to cope with her coursework at Hogwarts. Dumbledore informs them of Sirius's location in the castle and tacitly encourages them to rescue him: "If all goes well, you will be able to save more than one innocent life tonight. But remember this, both of you: *You must not be seen*. Miss Granger, you know the law – you know what is at stake ... *you – must – not – be – seen*" [sic] (*Azkaban* 418). He, then, quietly suggests "three turns should do it", indicating that Hermione should turn the clock three hours back (*Azkaban* 418). With the ingenious use of the Time-Turner, the pair is able to save Buckbeak, a hippogriff, who is being unjustly executed by Ministry officials. They also help Sirius escape on Buckbeak before the arrival of Dementors. The Headmaster's indirect nudge changes the entire sequence of events, and two innocent lives condemned under the guise of justice are saved. It is rather intriguing that Dumbledore's defiance is not loud or conspicuous; it is subtle and discreet instead, teaching us that true leadership does not necessarily stem from blind obedience to institutional authority. His act of disobedience is a critique of institutional authority, demonstrating that individuals sometimes must circumvent the law when said authority fails to deliver justice.

This sense of defiance, it appears, is instinctual in Harry as well. In the graveyard scene in the fourth book, after being 'reborn', Voldemort proceeds to flaunt his prowess in front of his followers by forcing Harry to fight him: "[w]e bow to each other, Harry.... I said, *bow*" [sic] (*Goblet* 556). While the Death Eaters, or the followers of the Dark Lord, jeeringly watch the spectacle, Voldemort forcefully bends Harry's spine using his wand. Regardless, Harry thinks to

himself that though: “he [Harry] was going to die ... he wasn’t going to play along. He wasn’t going to obey Voldemort ... he wasn’t going to beg. . . .” (*Goblet* 557). Harry shouts ““I WON’T!”” [sic] (*Goblet* 557). When Voldemort approaches him to duel with wands, Harry “knew one thing only ... beyond fear or reason – he was not going to die crouching here like a child playing hide-and-seek; he was not going to die kneeling at Voldemort’s feet ... he was going to die upright like his father, and he was going to die trying to defend himself, even if no defense was possible” (*Goblet* 558). Harry holds his head high even in the face of death. He refuses to be diminished by the moment and allow Voldemort to strip away his dignity. Where Voldemort demonstrates that power is exercised through domination, Harry proves that inner strength lies in bravery and fidelity to one’s sense of integrity in the face of coercion.

At the closing of *Goblet of Fire*, after the Triwizard Tournament is won by Harry, Dumbledore informs the Minister for Magic that Voldemort has risen once again. Fudge refuses to believe him as he thinks Dumbledore and the others ““are all determined to start a panic that will destabilize everything we have worked for these last thirteen years!”” [sic] (*Goblet* 594). This creates friction and distrust between the two wizards. However, on the last day of school, Dumbledore addresses all students, telling them that the Ministry did not want him to divulge the truth of Voldemort’s return and that some parents might frown upon this decision: ““either because they will not believe that Lord Voldemort has returned, or because they think I should not tell you so, young as you are”” (*Goblet* 607). Nevertheless, referring to the tragic death of a Hogwarts student Cedric Diggory at the hands of Voldemort, he continues: ““[i]t is my belief, however, that the truth is generally preferable to lies, and that any attempt to pretend that Cedric died as the result of an accident, or some sort of blunder of his own, is an insult to his memory”” (*Goblet* 607). He implores those gathered, students and faculty of the three international

schools—Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and Durmstrang Institute—to unite despite differences in ideological leanings, language and culture. Throughout the series, Dumbledore always holds the higher moral ground, preferring to call a spade a spade rather than seeking shelter behind palatable falsehoods.

The chasm between Dumbledore and Fudge widens even further in the next book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. The Minister manages to install Dolores Umbridge as the new Defense against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts. Umbridge, who toes the Ministry line, refuses to teach students defensive magic. In response, Harry and his like-minded schoolmates form a secret club, against school rules, which they name ‘Dumbledore’s Army’, or the D.A., in jest. After several weeks of successful lessons, one of the members betrays the D.A.; as a result, Harry is caught and marched to the Headmaster’s office. Dumbledore, however, takes the entire blame for the secret organisation. A gleeful Fudge informs Dumbledore that he would now be arrested, charged and packed off to Azkaban before trial. The Headmaster calmly declares: “‘it’s just that you seem to be laboring under the delusion that I am going to – what is the phrase? ‘Come quietly.’ I am afraid I am not going to come quietly at all, Cornelius. I have absolutely no intention of being sent to Azkaban’” (*Order* 620). As soon as Fudge gives orders to the Aurors—a highly trained elite wizard force working for the Ministry as magical reinforcement officers—to seize Dumbledore, a “streak of silver light flashed around the room; there was a bang like a gunshot and the floor trembled” raising a “cloud of dust” after which many bodies crashed to the floor (*Order* 621). As the dust cleared, Harry saw the “wreckage of the office.... Dumbledore’s desk had been overturned, all of the spindly tables had been knocked to the floor, their silver instruments in pieces” (*Order* 621). Fudge, Umbridge and the Aurors lay unconscious on the floor. Dumbledore uses a hex to outmanoeuvre everyone except Professor Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress, and Harry. With these parting words to McGonagall: ““I am not leaving to go into hiding. Fudge will soon wish he’d never dislodged me from Hogwarts, I promise you””, he is gone, leaving behind bewildered Ministry officials (*Order* 622). His act of defiance is akin to civil disobedience. He respects the law but stands up against political manipulation and abuse of legal authority.

In the sixth book, readers are introduced to Horcruxes – objects imbued with dark magic that can store a portion of a wizard’s soul, enabling them to return to life even after death. Voldemort, Dumbledore deduces, has created seven such Horcruxes. While tutoring Harry in the book about Voldemort’s history and his hypothesis of Horcruxes, Dumbledore insightfully explains to Harry that ““Voldemort himself created his worst enemy, just as tyrants everywhere do Have you any idea how much tyrants fear the people they oppress? All of them realize that, one day, amongst their many victims, there is sure to be one who rises against them and strikes back!”” [sic] (*Half-Blood* 477). The Headmaster perceptively observes that the audacity to challenge or defy the suzerainty of the oppressor rises from within those being persecuted.

Furthermore, it appears as if Harry has drawn valuable lessons from his mentor as well. He is not afraid to speak his mind to the new Minister for Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour. Towards the end of *Half-Blood Prince*, at Dumbledore’s funeral, Scrimgeour interrogates Harry about his and Dumbledore’s whereabouts on the night of the murder. Harry is bold enough to flatly refuse: ““Well, where I went with Dumbledore and what we did is my business. He didn’t want people to know.... I’ve got nothing to tell you”” (*Half-Blood* 604). Thereafter, Scrimgeour again visits the trio in *Deathly Hallows* to hand over articles from Dumbledore’s will. However, the objects that he gives come a month too late. When Harry raises questions over for the delay, the ever-astute Hermione is quick to reply to the Minister that the Ministry probably wished to scrutinise

the contents of the will: “[y]ou had no right to do that.... [because] That law was created to stop wizards passing on Dark artifacts and the Ministry is supposed to have powerful evidence that the deceased’s possessions are illegal before seizing them! Are you telling me that you thought Dumbledore was trying to pass us something cursed?” (*Deathly Hallows* 104-105). The Minister is so impressed with her that he asks if she was “planning to follow a career in Magical Law” (*Deathly Hallows* 105). An incensed Hermione replies: “No, I’m not.... I’m hoping to do some good in the world!” (*Deathly Hallows* 105). Clearly, Hermione has come far. From a rule-abiding student in *Philosopher’s Stone* to *Deathly Hallows*, she has come to realise that laws can be exploited and institutions can be unjust. She no longer trusts an institution that is manipulative and morally compromised. When Scrimgeour persistently keeps inquiring about Dumbledore’s motive behind bequeathing the gifts, an exasperated Harry bursts into anger and confronts the Minister about “covering up breakouts from Azkaban” and about hushing up the killing of an auror named Mad-Eye Moody by Voldemort (*Deathly Hallows* 110). During the conversation that ensues, Ron takes his wand out in defense. Harry, however, intervenes. Even so, an enraged Scrimgeour loses control and declares: “You go too far.... Remembered that I am not Dumbledore, who forgave your insolence and insubordination? You may wear that scar like a crown, Potter, but it is not up to a seventeen year-old boy to tell me how to do my job! It’s time you learned some respect!” (*Deathly Hallows* 110). Harry’s pert response aptly sums up his sentiments towards the establishment: “It’s time you earned it” (*Deathly Hallows* 110). He refuses to become a political stooge of the Ministry because he is committed towards seeking the truth and believes that justice far outweighs fidelity towards a morally bankrupt institution. Standing up to authority, however, is not a characteristic of Harry alone; his friends also bear similar traits. In fact, Ron’s entire family, except for Percy Weasley, has been labelled as ‘blood-

traitors'. Though Arthur Weasley works for the Ministry, all Weasley family members, apart from Percy, are loyal members of the Order of the Phoenix, a secret organisation set up by Dumbledore the last time Voldemort had been in power. Other members of the Order included James and Lily Potter and the Longbottoms in the past; Sirius Black and Remus Lupin among many others in the present.

As *Deathly Hallows* comes to a close, Harry enters Hogwarts to hunt for the Horcrux-Diadem. Through his scar, Harry has been gauging Voldemort's mind and tracking his movements. Therefore, he is already aware of the fact that Voldemort has been visiting his old Horcruxes, ensuring their safety. Finding none of them intact, a furious Voldemort is now on a warpath and heading towards Hogwarts. Harry warns Professor McGonagall of the same and asks her to evacuate the school to avoid casualties while he continues his search. Without batting an eyelid, McGonagall gathers the faculty to inform them: "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named [Voldemort] is coming.... Potter has work to do in the castle on Dumbledore's orders. We need to put in place every protection of which we are capable while Potter does what he needs to do" (*Deathly Hallows* 482). When Professor Flitwick, Head of Ravenclaw, exclaims: "[y]ou realize, of course, that nothing we do will be able to keep out You-Know-Who indefinitely?", Professor Pomona Sprout, Head of Hufflepuff, quickly counters: "[b]ut we can hold him up" [sic] (*Deathly Hallows* 482). Professor McGonagall, with a single spell, sets all the "statues and suits of armour" into motion: "Hogwarts is threatened.... Man the boundaries, protect us, do your duty to the school!" (*Deathly Hallows* 484). Along the way, she comes across the Head of Slytherin, Professor Slughorn, who has hardly ever been known to take a stand. He warns McGonagall: "I'm not at all sure whether this is wise, Minerva. He [Voldemort] is bound to find a way in, you know, and anyone who has tried to delay him will be in most grievous peril –"

(*Deathly Hallows* 484). Undeterred, she retorts: ““If you wish to leave with your students, we shall not stop you. But if any of you attempt to sabotage our resistance or take up arms against us within this castle, then, Horace, we duel to kill.... The time has come for Slytherin House to decide upon its loyalties”” (*Deathly Hallows* 484). In most children’s books, adults are depicted as either absent or ineffective. The rationale for this is to give the child protagonist the freedom to act independently. In *Harry Potter*, however, resisting a degenerate, oppressive and self-serving authority has become a collective responsibility. Rowling intentionally brings together the Hogwarts faculty and its recent graduates, members of the Order, and members of the D.A. to fight against tyranny in the Battle at Hogwarts.

Children’s literature is full of examples where certain literary characters are either out-and-out evil or, are innocent, but have helplessly come under the influence of evil. The reader can distinguish that where the former is a villain, the latter is essentially ‘good’ but has been bewitched or has given in to temptation. For instance, little Kay in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale “The Snow Queen” (1844) becomes cruel and scornful towards his loved ones when a splinter from an evil magic mirror gets into his eyes and heart; or the White Witch in C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) who is a completely evil character, in contrast to young Edmund Pevensie, an essentially a ‘good’ character, who comes under her influence and betrays his siblings. In other words, the stories imply certain vulnerabilities in the child characters who are primarily honourable but have been morally corrupted by an outside agency.

In the case of the *Potter* books, however, it has been argued that the ‘good’ characters are not positive role models since they show little or no “remorse over their ‘evil’ actions” (Abanes 130). In fact, it appears as if they are “often rather proud of themselves and their misdeeds”

(Abanes 130). Another “undesirable behavior” amongst the author’s ‘good’ characters is “disobedience” (Abanes 130). This might seem to be the case at first glance, nevertheless, it is crucial to delve deeper and understand the underlying motive(s) behind the rule-breaking and the ‘undesirable behaviour’. Unlike Fred and George Weasley, Ron’s twin siblings, Harry rarely breaks rules for amusement. His acts of disobedience emanate from a need to get to the root cause of the conundrum or mystery in each book. So, counter to Richard Abanes argument, ‘good’ characters in *Harry Potter* can be positive role models. For a child reader who is an introvert like Neville, the arc of his character development in the subsequent books undoubtedly proves inspiring. In the same way, the significance of Dobby’s quiet disobedience lies in his ability to exercise his moral choice despite being part of a system that is morally so corrupt that it considers house-elves to be vermin. Harry, too, is a positive role model because he is consistently courageous and loyal. Moreover, he demonstrates a willingness to defend those who are powerless as can be seen in the case of Dobby.

Besides, had positive role models and obedience been the criteria of judging children’s stories, the world would have been bereft of classics with memorable characters such as Gretel (“Hansel and Gretel” in 1812), the ugly duckling (“The Ugly Duckling” in 1843), Dorothy Gale (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900), Mary Lennox (*The Secret Garden* in 1911), Hugo Cabret (*The Invention of Hugo Cabret* in 2007) and many more. Conformity would rarely make for an interesting story. Conflict is integral to the progression of a story as it allows the author to depict the trajectory of the child protagonist’s growth. Therefore, such portrayals of ‘disobedience’ need to be understood as encouraging curiosity and the spirit of independent inquiry in children.

The authors of *The Yes Brain: How to Cultivate Courage, Curiosity and Resilience in Your Child* (2018) suggest that parents often focus on external goals that seem achievable such

as scores on standardised tests, paying little or no attention to internal goals that comprise “building the skills of emotional regulation and resilience; introducing an awareness of an inner world; developing the flame of desire for curiosity, compassion, and creativity; encouraging insight and a concern for others” (191). In other words, when a child does not conform to established rules, it does not necessarily imply that they are being difficult. Children need a space where they can test boundaries, question rules, think for themselves and discover where they stand. The twentieth century has witnessed many authoritarian regimes and devastating wars. It comes as no surprise, then, that authors have become sceptical of conforming to an authority that remains unquestioned.

Further, in this context, Rowling responded to a question asked by a fan during an interview with Katie Couric, wherein she was asked what she thought of parents who did not encourage their children to read *Harry Potter*:

‘I’d say what I’ve always said. I think they are very moral books. I truly believe that. There are people who are uncomfortable with the fact that I explore morality to an extent. In other words, the children do challenge accepted authority, they do break rules. I think those are healthy things. I’m never going to agree with someone who feels that you should shut up and do what you are told because I am older than you. I just don’t believe that that is a good basis for discipline or education, I really don’t!’ (“JK Rowling Interview 2005” 00:05:25 – 00:05:55).

Summing up the nature of this argument, Steve Wohlberg rightly declares: “[w]ords fly, lines are drawn, emotions sizzle, and the debate rolls on....[but] *Nobody remains neutral about Potter*” [sic] (40). There is no one sitting on the fence when it comes to the wizarding world of Harry Potter.

To conclude, it may be contended that Rowling does valorise rebelliousness, but it needs to be situated in the context of the story. Defiance against established authority occurs when said authority is either in denial regarding the resurgence of evil forces or is in cahoots with the same. In either case, justice, peace and harmony have now become the responsibility of the citizenry. When anarchy is let loose upon the world, rebelliousness, courage, and daring are the very traits that become the need of the hour. Literary characters in children's stories raise their voice against the status quo, teaching young readers that conformity is not always a positive trait. Children learn that resilience, the ability to search for alternatives, and the courage to challenge authority are valuable skills that help in upholding fairness and integrity. These are traits that are extremely crucial for future citizens of the world. Thus, even though the *Harry Potter* books and films have been around for a few decades, with a new series now in the offing, their relevance refuses to wane. It is a story that appears to keep reinventing itself.

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