

“HONESTLY, WOMAN, YOU CALL YOURSELF OUR MOTHER?": MOTHERS
AND WITCHES IN HARRY POTTER

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ABSTRACT:

MARY-EILEEN RANKIN: Motherhood and Witches in Harry Potter
(under the direction of Dr. Mary Hayes)

This thesis aims to analyze the importance of maternal nurture and the “witches as mothers” trope in the Harry Potter series. This nurture is traditional as well as perverse and appears in characters besides the adult women. Rowling creates characters who appeal to paradigms of the Early Modern “bad mother” witch who harmed children among other accusations associated with female sexuality and motherhood. Additionally, Rowling challenges the negative stereotype of associating witches and bad mothering by presenting witches as “good mothers.” The power of maternal nurture in the series is best seen through the good mothers. This theme plays such a significant role that it even presents itself in “non-mothers” like men and children.

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Introduction

On a train to London in 1990, the idea for a boy wizard going to a magic school came to fruition in Joanne Rowling's head. Twenty-five years later, that idea has inspired seven books, eight films, a theme park, and countless imaginations. Reading the *Harry Potter* books as a young girl, I fell in love with the world Rowling created. As a child, I was not aware that a single mother living on welfare wrote characters like Hermione Granger and Minerva McGonagall. I did not, nor did much of the world, originally know that "J.K. Rowling," the ambiguous pseudonym she was advised to take on, was actually a woman. Her publishers suggested the pseudonym, assuming a female writer would not sell well to the young boy market at which *Potter* was aimed.

Rowling's series, however, depicts many strong, powerful women, both good and evil. In an interview for the DVD release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I*, Rowling and many of the female cast members from the film series discussed the female characters. Rowling explains how although the protagonist was a young boy, the women were much easier for her to write and are hugely influential in the series. Rowling states, "[Harry] is such a boy in need of a father, and yet in these times of real stress it's his mother that's a place of refuge" ("Women of Harry Potter"). Speaking later on the importance of maternal nurture she says, "As a woman, and as a daughter, maybe I feel that it's a form of love that doesn't get explored nearly enough" ("Women of Harry Potter"). Molly Weasley, Lily Potter, and Narcissa Malfoy prove in specific moments how their maternal nurture is one of their strongest qualities. Investigating further, we

find that even non-mothers, like McGonagall, Bellatrix, and Umbridge, have maternal qualities that are exhibited in correlation with their levels of power.

Although we may see how non-mothers can be maternal (McGonagall proves to be a prime example), characters like Bellatrix Lestrange and Dolores Umbridge (who will be properly introduced in the first chapter) seem to be patently anti-maternal. But “maternity and witches” is not an idea that originated with Rowling. In the Early Modern era, when witchcraft accusations and trials were rampant, a hefty majority of the accusations were linked to a woman’s maternal nurture or female sexuality: how she treated children, whether she cared for demonic creatures, and whether she had had alleged sexual relations with the devil. Some of Rowling’s characters, both men and women, appeal to the bad mother trope of witches from Early Modern era accusations. However, many of her other characters are in fact “good mothers” who are powerful witches that are still loving mothers. This maternal nurture is more than qualities some of the characters possess; it is a hugely important theme of the entire series. Before delving into how Rowling invokes the historical association of witches with mothers, I will examine prior scholarship on the series.

Countless journal articles have been written on different aspects of the *Potter* series, from marketing techniques to religious symbolism. The great scholarly attention to this children’s series is understandable given that the series includes a million words over the course of seven books and has inspired a brand that is worth approximately \$15

billion (*Food World News*)¹. The series has become a profitable business, but its literary themes and social commentary have also sparked academic interest. Critics analyzing the *Harry Potter* series since its original publication in 1997 have focused on subjects from politics to religion.

Lana A. Whited, editor of *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, compiled some of the early scholarship on *Harry Potter*. In her introduction, she states that many schools around the United States and world banned the *Potter* series, especially in its early days. The majority of the opposition came from the Christian right wing, which claimed that because the series centered on witchcraft and magic it was work of the devil (Whited 3). Leanne Simmons wrote an article in *Pastoral Psychology* about how the *Potter* series associates magic with identity formation rather than devil worship. Yet, fundamentalist Christians take issue with this loss of “moral control” that the use of magic implies (Simmons 53). Although schools have had to be cautious when adding *Potter* to their curricula because of religious opposition, other academics have invoked religious imagery in *Potter*. Wendy Hennequin uses medieval hagiography to explain various scenes in *Potter*. She compares Voldemort’s ability to control snakes to St. Patrick’s. For Hennequin, the memorabilia of the four Hogwarts founders calls to mind to saints’ relics. Other critical analyses focus on the issue of revenge that underlies the series (Nielson). The scholarly line of inquiry explores how more series themes cooperate with fantasy and adventure in a series meant for children.

¹ This statistic was taken from *Food World News* in a December 2014 article on Rowling’s declining wealth.

In the prior scholarship on *Harry Potter*, most relevant to my study are various feminist approaches to the series. In "J. K. Rowling's Ambivalence Towards Feminism: House Elves—Women In Disguise—In The 'Harry Potter' Books," Rivka Temima Kellner calls the oppression of house elves in the series a backwards move for feminism. Meredith Cherland questions what the general role of gender means in the children's series in "Harry's Girls: Harry Potter and the Discourse of Gender". Cherland discusses how feminist post structural theory works in the *Harry Potter* series. My work examines the roles of mothers and maternal nurture in the series. Maternal nurture is not only a major theme in *Harry Potter* but had also been integral in witchcraft accusations of women in Early Modern Europe. These accusations describe the witch as first and foremost as a mother. The witch's association with maternity evokes for Deborah Willis "bad mother" described by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (21). Quite simply, the "bad mother" withholds nurture rather than dispenses it; instead of nurturing children, she harms or punishes them. In the Brothers Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel*, the witch who feeds children in order to eat them offers a convenient crib for this idea.

The story of *Hansel and Gretel* has an overarching theme of perverse maternal nurture. Hansel and Gretel's stepmother leaves them in the woods because she and the children's father can no longer care for them. The children try to find their way home but get lost and happen upon an edible house. The old witch who lives there invites them in and feeds them. Although first nurturing, the witch soon tries to cook Hansel and eat him. The children eventually outsmart the witch and lock her in the oven, killing her

(Grimm²). This character is a convenient example of bad mother because she is well known and her actions not only appeal to the bad mother trope in history but also in *Harry Potter*. Rowling's attention to the theme of maternal nurture includes bad mothers as well as good mothers. The good mother trope challenges the historically-based negative association between witches and motherhood.

This thesis is an analysis of the mothers in *Harry Potter* through a feminist lens informed by historical associations of witches as mothers. The majority of the historical research centers on Early Modern British trials and cultural constructions of the witch. The two predominant scholars' works I use are Diane Purkiss's *The Witch in History* and Deborah Willis's *Malevolent Nurture*. Purkiss's study provides historical insight into the culture of Early Modern women and witchcraft accusations as well as modern interpretations of the Early Modern witches. The value of Purkiss's study to my reading of the Harry Potter series is its analysis of witchcraft as a literary trope and the witch as a literary figure.

My understanding of the historical association between witches and mothers comes from Deborah Willis's book *Malevolent Nurture*. Informed by Melanie Klein, Willis's sociopsychological study uses the term "bad mother" to explain Early Modern constructions of the witch. Drawing upon Willis, I define the bad mother by certain criteria: having a perverse sexual relationship with the devil, being submissive to a male authoritative figure (usually the devil), and harming children. I use this trope in the first chapter "Bad Mothers," which studies Rowling's portrait of the witch as a "bad mother." Additionally, in my subsequent two chapters, I show how Rowling critically reworks this

² *Grimm's Fairytales* by the Brothers Grimm, translated by Margaret Hunt

familiar trope to associate witchcraft with “good mothers,” a category that, surprisingly, can include children and even men who offer maternal nurture through practicing magic.

The first chapter, “Bad Mothers,” analyzes the trope of bad mother as seen in the characters Bellatrix and Umbridge. Bellatrix is a Death Eater, one of Lord Voldemort’s, the series’ antagonist, loyal followers. She is erratic and cruel towards anyone who stands in Voldemort’s way. Dolores Umbridge is an official of the Ministry of Magic who comes to Hogwarts as essentially a spy for the wizard government. She is well mannered, polite, pompous, and condescending. Soon she begins to use her positions at Hogwarts and the Ministry to physically punish students who misbehaved. Bellatrix and Umbridge are very different in personality yet at their core they fall under the trope of bad mother because of a few criteria: harming children, sexual relationships with the devil, and being submissive to a man in authority. These criteria come from Early Modern accusations of witchcraft. To account for the fact that the large majority of the accused were women, Julian Goodare explains that according to Early Modern reasoning, the woman’s body was weak and penetrable, therefore easily manipulated by the devil (Goodare 288). In this cultural anxiety, we can see a fear of power that women gained through motherhood. As if to limit this essentially female power, witches were accused of having a sexual relationship with the devil, a male figure to whom they were thus subordinate.

In the second chapter, “Good Mothers,” I show how Rowling complicates the traditional association of witches as bad mothers by presenting witches who are nurturing mothers. In these counter examples, Rowling is influenced by feminist re-interpretations

of the Early Modern witch. As Purkiss explains, feminist historians of the 1970s described the Early Modern witchcraft trials as a form of patriarchal oppression. They believed the women accused of witchcraft were intelligent, nurturing, and self-sacrificing for the good of others. This hypothetical figure is epitomized in the “healing witch” who was martyred during the witchhunts for her implied threat to male doctors. Three of the mothers I analyze have distinct moments where they risk or actually give up their lives for the wellbeing of their children. Additionally, these characters show how motherhood in fact cooperates with the use of witchcraft whose ultimate goal is nurture

The characters analyzed in the second chapter are Molly Weasley, Narcissa Malfoy, Lilly Potter, and Minerva McGonagall. Molly Weasley is mother to Ron, Harry’s best friend, and his five brothers and sister, Ginny. She is a housewife and a fiercely loving mother to not only her own children but also Harry and Hermione Granger, Harry and Ron’s other best friend. Narcissa is the mother of Harry’s school nemesis, Draco. Narcissa is not even introduced fully until the penultimate book, but she shows that her child is the most important person in her life. Lily is Harry’s mother whom the audience only meets in stories from other characters or via flashbacks. In the Harry Potter series, Lily is the pinnacle of maternal nurture through self-sacrifice. As she stands in front of her child to protect him, she pleads to Voldemort, “Kill me! Not Harry!” (381). Lily is inevitably killed, but her love protects Harry for the remainder of his childhood. Minerva McGonagall is the deputy headmistress of Hogwarts and head of Harry’s house, Gryffindor. McGonagall is very strict yet is a source of comfort for Harry

and protection for other students at the school. These women all are examples of the powerful witch who still can exhibit maternal nurture.

The third chapter, “Non-Mothers and Maternal Nurture”, analyzes how maternal nurture is present in “non-mothers,” particularly men and children. For men, Hagrid is the main example of a character who possesses qualities affiliated with the witch as mother. Hagrid is a half-giant wizard and Hogwarts Groundskeeper. As Groundskeeper, Hagrid loves magical creatures in a similar way to Early Modern accused witches as bad mothers cared for animal familiars, demonic imps who did their bidding. These familiars served as pseudo-children for many of these bad witches, many of whom were too old to have human children. While Hagrid cared for these magical creatures in a similar way to the bad mothers, he did not use these animals for ill will. In fact, despite his association with animal familiars, Hagrid helps and cares for many of the children, which suggests Rowling means to revise the traditional figure of the witch as bad mother. Other men like Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts and Harry’s mentor, and Professor Snape, the Potions master who loathes Harry but was in love with Lily, are interesting to examine in terms of maternal nurture. Most aspects of the *Harry Potter* universe are fairly gender equal. The founders of Hogwarts were two men and two women, Ginny and Harry are both extremely talented Quidditch (Wizarding Sport) players, and both Hermione and Ron help Harry save the day. While the series presents many examples of gender equality, its male characters cannot nurture as well as the women.

The maternal nurture in the series is bestowed upon the many children of Hogwarts. However, these children also must act to vanquish bad witches who have harmed other children rather than nurturing them. The story of *Hansel and Gretel* can illuminate this relationship between children, maternal nurture, and power. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the children invoke the victims of the witch's malevolent nurture chronicled in Early Modern trial transcripts. However, the children outsmart the witch and kill her, neutralizing and obtaining power over the bad mother. In the *Harry Potter* series, many of stories center around children outsmarting or physically battling some type of harmful adult force, plots that evoke the literary example provided by *Hansel and Gretel*.

Additionally, this chapter considers how maternal nurture affects the individual characters. As I explained earlier, Rowling made a conscious effort to show how important maternal love is for humans. The archvillain Voldemort, who was abandoned at birth and never had that special connection with his mother, is a striking example of this. He had no ability to love or care for another being which inevitably led to his downfall towards evil.

The importance of maternal nurture in the Harry Potter series reflects on its influence on human psychological development, a female power so threatening in the Early Modern era that it became associated with witchcraft.

Chapter 1: The Bad Mother

In the Early Modern era, a “witch” could have been anyone from a social outcast, to a midwife, to a woman who angered another woman. The accusations included a variety of dark acts usually associated with reproduction or sexuality. The “bad witch” is a literary depiction of historical witches. Crimes included everything from harming unborn babies to feeding demonic imps blood to sleeping with the Devil himself. Because of the accusations’ common theme relating to being or becoming a mother, Deborah Willis borrows the term “bad mother” from the psychologist Melanie Klein to describe this archetype. Certain women in Harry Potter fall under the “bad mother” category because of characteristics like harming children, having sex with the devil, and using power that is actually contingent on male authority rather than coming from the women themselves. Rowling’s use of this trope is not only a reflection of what being a witch meant in correlation with motherhood in the Early Modern era, but also acts as a counterexample to her “Good Mothers,” examined in the subsequent chapters.

In Early Modern Britain, accusations of witchcraft were not uncommon and the common contemporary view of these women was summed up as “bad mother.” Deborah Willis uses the term “bad mother” to describe a witch as “mothers gone bad, women past childbearing years who used their mothering powers against neighbors who had enraged them” (ix). Women accused of being witches allegedly targeted other women, particularly young mothers and their children. Willis further describes a “bad mother” as

“a malevolent antimother to her neighbors and their children” (34). So many of the accusations had stems in mothering, children, childbirth, reproduction, and sexuality, as maternity was a key part of women’s lives. Maternity and everything associated with being a mother and becoming a mother defined the women of the Early Modern era. Women were able to obtain little power in the Early Modern period outside domesticity and motherhood. This theme of maternity carries heavily into the *Harry Potter* series, at the plot’s and many characters’ cores. Maternal love, even perverse maternal love as shown by the bad mother, equates to defining a woman’s character in *Harry Potter*.

The image of “bad mother” is associated with a traditional view of a witch as evil, exemplified in literature. The “bad mother” may not necessarily have children of her own but exemplifies anti-maternal actions, attitudes, and tendencies. Common examples include the witches of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and The Brothers Grimm’s *Hansel and Gretel*. In *Hansel and Gretel*, a witch lures children into her home with food, but soon traps them, overfeeds them, and plans to eat them (Grimm). The “Gingerbread House” witch from *Hansel and Gretel* is an archetypal character who chose to eat children, which could be considered the pinnacle of “anti-maternal behavior.”

The bad mother makes appearances in the *Harry Potter* series in different characters explicitly by three criteria that readily apply to the “bad mother” archetype: harming children, having sex with the devil, and using power that is actually contingent on male authority. The two predominant “bad mothers” are Bellatrix Lestrange and Dolores Umbridge. Before delving into the perverse maternal qualities of the bad

mothers, I will look at the “sex with the devil” criterion of witchcraft accusations and show how the motif is present in the *Harry Potter* series.

Female sexuality is a significant factor in the analysis of Early Modern witchcraft accusations. In the mid-sixteenth century fornication and adultery were criminalized (Goodare 294). When women were accused of witchcraft, they were also given an additional charge of some sexual crime. The women allegedly made a pact with the devil and proceeded to have sex with him. This was more common amidst elite discourse, in which the witch was stripped of the power of which she was being accused. Elite and gentry level sought to separate the witchcraft and power by claiming another source of power was controlling the accused witch. Willis states, “...it is a mistake to think the witch has any independent power of her own...she is a subordinate under Satan’s control, a mere servant or ‘drudge’” (90). Men wanted to believe that even in the most perverse nature of witchcraft and devil worship, it would still be unfathomable for a woman to have power.

The first bad mother of *Harry Potter* is Bellatrix Lestrange. Bellatrix is one of the few female Death Eaters, and certainly the most devoted within Voldemort’s innermost circle. She has an extremely close relationship with Lord Voldemort. Bellatrix’s relationship with Voldemort is a near exact parallel of the accusations of the Early Modern era. Deborah Willis states in *Malevolent Nurture* that female witches were believed to be completely submissive to the devil, doing his bidding, and wreaking havoc upon the world around them (89). Bellatrix’s sexuality, particularly with Voldemort, acts

as one of her strongest characteristics. Bellatrix worships and is completely obsessed with Voldemort [“She eyed him with worshipful fascination” (*Deathly Hallows*, 770)]. Helena Bonham Carter, who portrays Bellatrix on screen, explains that Bellatrix believes she’s the only true follower of Voldemort (“The Women of Harry Potter”). In *Deathly Hallows*, Bellatrix speaks to Voldemort “like a lover” (793). When Bellatrix and Narcissa visit Snape’s home in *Half-Blood Prince*, Bellatrix goes on a tirade to Snape about how she risked everything for Voldemort while Snape played it safe in “hiding.” Bellatrix went to Azkaban, wizards’ prison, for Voldemort and believes anyone who did less was unworthy of Voldemort’s attention. Bellatrix’s obsession with Voldemort reflects the accusations of sexual relationships with the devil.

Julian Goodare, a Scottish witchcraft scholar at the University of Edinburgh, further examines this sexual relationship with the devil. Goodare writes that women were accused of witchcraft, concluded by accusations of relationships or “pacts” with the devil. He states, “The Scottish authorities came to believe that when a woman made a pact with the Devil, he had sex with her—first as part of the bargain, and from time to time thereafter” (294). Sexual relationships with the Devil became an assumed addition to any witchcraft accusation in seventeenth century Scotland. Some women admitted (perhaps under duress) to extramarital relationships with Satan, or at least the desire to have one (Goodare 295).

Similarly, Bellatrix desired to have a sexual relationship with Voldemort, despite the fact she was married. Willis explains that the dependence on the male devil comes

from gentry-level interpretation of witches and accusations. Rather than allowing women to be threatening on their own, even in an occult way, the power was still in the hands of the man to whom these women were submitting. Rowling explains Bellatrix in a similar way: “There’s an interesting thing about female psychopaths. They often need to meet a male counterpart to release that part of themselves, and that’s how I see Bellatrix.

Voldemort clearly is her idol and her obsession. He is the only person to whom she feels that subservience” (“Women of Harry Potter”). Any time Bellatrix is in the presence of Voldemort, she becomes immediately meeker. She offers her help to Voldemort in every way, consistently being in the lead in his group of followers known as Death Eaters. The sexual relationship with the devil accusation proved to be one of the most difficult accusations to handle as a seventeenth century Scottish woman. Goodare explains the double standard: “Although their sexual identity made women vulnerable, they could not simply play it down; it was linked to the nurturing role which was expected of them...to be socially accepted, women had to keep the dangerous sexual side of their natures under control but keep the nurturing side constantly in view” (297). Goodare goes on further to explain that if the “balancing act” was off, women could have been quickly accused of witchcraft (297). Women who were mothers obviously had had sex, but being open about that fact led to false accusations of worshipping the devil.

The next accusation was the harming of others through magic, known as the type of magic “maleficium.” As the *Harry Potter* series centers around a school of young

adolescents, the maleficium performed within this series is mostly upon children as was fairly common among accused witches of the Early Modern era.

Willis focuses specifically on late sixteenth and early seventeenth century witchcraft accusations in Britain. Women accused of witchcraft in Britain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had “mother” attached to them in a variety of ways, in their names, titles, or societal roles they adopted. The accused were often referred to “Mother” and their surname, as was customary in communities (Willis 34). Willis describes a witch as “a woman who brought envy, anger, and hatred into a community’s informal networks of female neighbors. She used her mothering powers to betray other mothers” (35).

Willis also suggests that these descriptions of accused witches stem from mothers’ fears of their children’s vulnerability to harm, causing hysteria among community women (35). This fear led to many accusers being fellow women, often being angered from simple neighborly disputes to more serious cases involving ill or dead children. Accused witches were believed to have animal “familiar” they treated like their babies, nurturing them, but in a perverse way. Rather than milk, these familiars, or sometimes demonic imps, fed on the blood of the mother witch or others. Willis states that with familiars, “the witch was a mother whose sacrificial feeding of a childlike imp enabled her to acquire magical power” (56).

The image Willis presents of the bad mother correlates to some of the characters in the Harry Potter series. Bellatrix is one such character. Bellatrix has no children of her own but in many instances has tortured or nearly killed many of the young characters.

She is part of a long line of “purebloods” of the Black family and detests anyone less than that magical blood status. The issue of prejudice is a huge theme throughout the series but plays particularly into Bellatrix’s treatment of others, including children. Although the “blood status” prejudice would be more comparable to racial prejudice, Bellatrix’s prejudices in particular are also socioeconomic. The Early Modern Witches may not have held the exact same prejudices as Bellatrix, but some scholars of Scottish witchcraft have researched the identities of the accused women (‘Survey of Scottish Witchcraft’). Most women, and an overwhelming majority of the accused witches were women, were poor. In a society where a woman’s worth was determined by her ability to have children, her only way of attaining economic power was to secure a husband. Research conducted at the University of Edinburgh claims most witches at the time were married and therefore had slightly better economic status. However, the range of statuses of women led to questions about Early Modern socioeconomic prejudices. Witchcraft could be detrimental to a woman’s social status as opposed to Rowling’s imagined world. Within the realm of Harry Potter, the more magic a family’s lineage has, the more prestige a family has. In Early Modern Britain, practicing witchcraft, or even the accusation, destroyed a family’s social standing.

The trial of Isabel Young is one of these cases. Young was accused of witchcraft in 1619 and was believed to be somewhere in her 60s or 70s. Young and her husband George Smith owned a small plot of land and were considered on the lowest level of the

local elite. Documents (Martin)³ show that the Smith-Young household was intertwined with other local elite families, mostly wealthier than they, in dealings of debt and quarreling. What began as a quarrel among neighbors over property turned into accusations of adultery and raising a bastard child. Neighbors later claimed, after Isabel publicly laid her husband's claim to another neighbor's, Thomas Home, lands, that she "magically battered the Home household, eventually destroying it" (Martin 14). Isabel was also accused of magically destroying Thomas Home's dovecote, which was considered a sign of affluence. After the loss of the dovecote, Home himself died and his house burned down. As Lauren Martin, a lead researcher on the Scottish Witchcraft survey conducted at the University of Edinburgh, stated, "It was as if once the dovecote, a symbol of his wealth and power, was drained, the rest of his household was thought vulnerable" (14). Isabel's own husband also accused her of maleficium, but her children stood by her, even testifying to her innocence. Isabel's social status, motherhood, and sexuality were all at the center of her witchcraft accusation more so than her alleged crime. Smith-Young is just one example of a woman accused of witchcraft in Early Modern Britain whose accusations are reflected in the *Harry Potter* series in the bad mother characters.

Although it is clear that Bellatrix has other qualities that reflect the Bad Mother, her predominant characteristic is her sick love of torturing others. Bellatrix's first spoken

³ Lauren Martin is a contributor of The Survey on Scottish Witchcraft. Her article "Witchcraft and Family: What can witchcraft documents tell us about Early Modern Scottish family life?" was published in *Scottish Tradition* in 2002. Martin wrote about her findings in the Smith-Young case documents in this article.

line is mocking Harry as an infant. Mere lines later, she tries to forcefully take a prophecy (contained in a glass orb) from Harry, and when he refuses, she threatens to torture Ginny Weasley, the youngest in the group. Later, Bellatrix tortures another child, Neville Longbottom, both emotionally by bringing up how she tortured his parents into madness and magically through the Cruciatus curse. In the seventh book, *Deathly Hallows*, Bellatrix appears when Harry, Ron, and Hermione have been captured and brought to Malfoy Manor. Upon seeing the teenagers, she orders the two boys to be sent to the dungeon while she tortures Muggle-born Hermione. In the film adaptation, Bellatrix even carves “mudblood,” a prejudicial slur for Muggle-born witches and wizards, into her forearm as she lie sobbing on the floor. Bellatrix’s victims are, as Willis describes the Early Modern witches’ victims, “[children] in the hands of a deadly mother” (56). Bellatrix appeals to the use of *maleficium*, or harmful magic, particularly towards children. However, Bellatrix is not the only witch in the series who purposefully seeks to harm children.

Dolores Umbridge graced Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in Harry’s fifth year as told in *Order of the Phoenix*. Umbridge comes to the school not only as the newest Defense Against the Dark Arts professor but also as eyes and ears for the Ministry of Magic. Umbridge is described as constantly wearing sickening amounts of pink, speaking in a condescending, high pitched voice, and simply being a nuisance of a teacher. As the students challenge her teaching methods in class, and therefore the Ministry’s public statements on Voldemort’s return, Umbridge’s eerily sweet sing-song

voice turns cold as she grants Harry a detention. During his detention, Harry is reprimanded and asked to write “I must not tell lies” repeatedly on parchment. When he uses the special quill Umbridge set out for him, it carves the sentence into the back of his hand repeatedly. At the detention’s conclusion, Umbridge states, “Tut, tut, I don’t seem to have made much of an impression yet,” referring to the fact that actual scars from his wounds had not formed yet, “Well, we’ll just have to try again tomorrow evening, won’t we?” (268). Throughout the course of Harry’s detentions, Umbridge is gleeful in inflicting more and more bloodshed and pain caused upon Harry.

Although Bellatrix does have more of the traditional characteristics of what can be labeled “bad mother,” or “evil witch,” Umbridge is far more sinister than Bellatrix, and possibly even Voldemort. Bellatrix is quite open about her sadism, her evilness, and her prejudices towards those she finds beneath her. Umbridge is underhanded and sneaky. Refer back to the *Hansel and Gretel* Gingerbread House Witch. She lured children in with candy, something sweet. The witch offered to care for the children, all the while plotting to eat them. Here, Umbridge tries to entice children by being sickeningly sweet, but her true character is much darker. She plays evil mind games, is verbally abusive, and is extremely hypocritical. Umbridge tries to portray herself as the most law-abiding witch yet escalates to using unforgivable curses on students to learn information regarding secret Defense Against the Dark Arts societies. She is seemingly a good person, being a law-abiding citizen and a supporter of education, but her treatment towards children is what defines her character. Umbridge’s evilness is further supported

by a questionable instance in *Order of the Phoenix* in which Harry's scar burns fiercely as Umbridge examines the wounds on his hand. Although this coincidence is never fully explained in the rest of the series, there is a clear parallel between Umbridge and Voldemort's shared evilness. Harry's scar burns exclusively when Voldemort is near. The moment when Umbridge touches Harry's body and the extreme pain associated with that touch refers back to a final scene in *Goblet of Fire* when Voldemort, fully embodied again, physically touches Harry and puts him in complete agony. Other instances of Umbridge's violence towards children include her questioning tactics in her "witch hunt" for students that support Dumbledore or Harry's assertion of Voldemort's return. Umbridge drags Harry by his hair from her office's fireplace (where he was trying to contact Sirius Black) and contorting his neck back "as though she was going to slit his throat" (741). She tries to force Harry to answer her questions through potions, and when that is not an option, she convinces herself that because this is an "interest of Ministry security" (743), she is justified in using the Cruciatus (torture) curse on Harry. She also reveals that she sent dementors, or creatures that suck out your soul, to Harry the previous summer in an attempt to stop him, quite permanently, spreading his story about Voldemort's return. In these moments, Rowling exemplifies Umbridge's true sadism and obsession with power. Umbridge hides her obsessions with causing pain under the cover of working for the Ministry.

As stated above, the two bad mother characters examined are vastly different.

Bellatrix is a counterexample to the maternal nurture that is dominant in the series

because of all of the surface level differences between she and the “good mothers.”

Umbridge, however, is misleading. When introduced to Umbridge, the reader may guess that she is going to be a nurturing character, until the moment where she is clearly the antithesis of nurture. Rowling not only shows how defining maternal nurture is for her characters but also how it is a separate determining factor of a character’s “goodness.” Umbridge follows the laws of the Ministry. Being a good citizen is often a merit of a character’s integrity and yet Umbridge is still clearly boxed into the bad mother trope because of her lack of nurture for others and particularly children.

This practice of harming others through magic would be considered “maleficium” in the Early Modern witch-hunts. These instances of both Bellatrix and Umbridge deliberately harming children are the pinnacle of classifying them as bad mothers. Willis states, “Women, not men, had a virtual monopoly on maleficium; women, not men, were believed most likely to bring sickness and death to their neighbors’ households” (28). Traditionally in religious, political, and literary contexts, men held this “forbidden knowledge” of a darker magic, yet were rarely indicted (Willis 28). They were even more rarely executed for such crimes and did not cause the same fear in villages and amongst neighbors. Mothers feared the threat of maleficium upon their own children, so much so that they were willing to destroy the lives of other women in their community for the protection of their children.

In the final chapters of *Deathly Hallows*, Bellatrix helps the Death Eaters in the Battle of Hogwarts. Bellatrix takes on Hermione, Luna Lovegood, and Ginny all at once,

shooting killing curses at all of them. Bellatrix's final moments were fighting Molly Weasley, Ginny's mother, in a fierce battle. The text reads, "Bellatrix Lestrange's smile faltered, and became a snarl. Jets of light flew from both wands, the floor around the witches' feet became hot and cracked; both women were fighting to kill" (806). This moment is an example of what Early Modern witch-hunt authorities were arguing; a witch (Bellatrix) mercilessly attacking a mother and child (Molly and Ginny).

This woman versus woman battle is centuries older than the Battle of Hogwarts. In seventeenth century Britain, women were not only the accused but often the accusers. Oftentimes, women accused other women of practicing witchcraft after disputes with neighbors. Willis argues that these quarrels among women were how they had control over their day-to-day lives in the patriarchal society of Early Modern Britain. Not only did many of these disputes revolve around household matters, but also defending vulnerable children. Willis cites J.A. Sharpe's study of seventeenth century Yorkshire witchcraft trials that were noted as "peculiarly enmeshed in women's quarrels" (36). On the village level, witchcraft accusations were very much the work of women. Julian Goodare, professor of Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh, claims, "the witch-hunt could never have claimed so many lives if women had not been willing to assert their own respectability by accusing others of transgressing community norms" (298). As most women were illiterate, men, usually their husbands, formally filed the complaints, so the legitimacy of these accusations are brought even more into question, simply because of the lack of direct reporting. Many accusations stemmed from problems

of mothering. Disputes and insults over ability to mother or, as Diane Purkiss writes, the harming of a mother in labor or her baby (100) were common themes in accusations. Women were taught to control their emotions even in times of great suffering like in the loss of a child (Purkiss 100). The only way women may have been able to grieve would be through the accusation of another woman practicing witchcraft against her child. Mothers, especially in the *Harry Potter* series, are willing to put their child above everything else. If a woman felt her child was threatened she may have sought revenge in any way possible. This devotion to the safety of the children is what the mothers in the next chapter have, and Bellatrix and Umbridge clearly lack. In an interesting psychological warfare tactic, Bellatrix targets Molly's motherhood, saying "What will happen to your children when I've killed you? When Mummy's gone the same way as Freddie?" (807). She references the fact that Molly just lost a child from Dark Magic. Helena Bonham Carter, who played Bellatrix in the adapted film series, describes Bellatrix in this scene as not understanding Molly's maternal love and instinct, even saying, "She's got other [children]. Why is she so upset about losing one ("The Women of Harry Potter")?" The Early Modern women's quarrels against one another were connected to rivalries over mothering.

Umbridge is an interesting example of the witch's maternal power. Umbridge has this seemingly nurturing position as a schoolteacher, but she is so obsessed with even the smallest amount of power, she will commit such atrocities as physically torturing children under the guise of protecting the governing body. Maternal power in the Early

Modern era was the struggle of just enough control for a woman without threatening a man. Men feared the fact that women not only brought life into the world but also had an understanding of this phenomenon that they could not fully grasp. According to Willis, women reminded men of all ages of their mothers and they felt like children (70).

Women, because of men's fear of women usurping their societal power, had to learn how to balance being maternal but not overly maternal to adult men (Willis 68-71). Umbridge shares with Bellatrix this trait of balancing power with a superior man and letting the audience witness this sadistic inner battle of fighting to be powerful yet submitting to a male authority figure. Umbridge revels in having control over these children, while at the Ministry she has to serve under the male Minister of Magic. Rowling explains Umbridge's desire for power, stating, "I do strongly express my worldview in the books. One of the things I find most revolting in life is self-righteousness that covers self-interest and that was Umbridge from beginning to end. And she's actually quite as sadistic as Bellatrix but it's all justified because 'I work for the Ministry ('The Women of Harry Potter').'"

While Umbridge and Bellatrix are strong characters and reflect the accused witches of the Early Modern era in actions, they also serve as a cautionary tale against patriarchal power. Early Modern people believed that even though women were considered evil and harming others, they still had to be under the control of a man, namely the Devil. Elite men, those in power or those who had better access to power, would have feared women in a position of authority. Even an occult power had to have

linkage to a man. Likewise, Umbridge works under the authority of the Minister of Magic and Bellatrix works under the direction of Voldemort. Umbridge obsesses over every ounce of her allotted power but is still under the authority of a man. Umbridge's relationship with the Minister of Magic is not implied to be sexual, but she almost worships his authority and acts on his and the Ministry's behalf, going as far as harming children. Bellatrix is crazy and erratic and a forceful witch, but her subservience confines her to this definition based around Voldemort.

Although Umbridge is a symbol of a woman powerless without a man, her position of power is still legitimate. Umbridge challenges the patriarchal society that has been in place from the Early Modern period through the twentieth century. In the seventeenth century, women began obtaining more legal power over property. Widows and mothers were the most likely to achieve this level of power. Willis explains this growing force of mothers. They were expected to serve as both inferior and submissive to their husbands yet also assist them in management of the household. Mothers' influence upon their sons, when too effective, was considered "bad mothering." Women were expected to nurture, but not so much that it would threaten a man's role in the family dynamic (70). Women's power and mother's power became one in the same as women rose in society—all the way to the thrones of both Scotland and England. The image of a woman in power was a reminder of a mother in charge of her child, and all the emotional fear brought with that thought, says Willis (71). This fear of women in power is referenced in John Knox's 1558 book *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the*

Monstruous Regiment of Women, and Willis notes that Knox references the legal aspects of mothering is what makes women incapable of ruling (71).

The fear of not just women but mothers in power gave anxiety to many men.

While Early Modern people feared maternal power, Rowling embraces it. She presents her bad mother characters to highlight through counterexamples the theme of maternal nurture throughout the entire series. In the subsequent chapters, I will examine how Rowling challenges the bad mother trope by presenting specific witches as “good mothers” as well as how she incorporates the theme of maternal nurture as a lingering theme rather than solely characteristics of people.

Chapter 2: The Good Mother

“Are you a good witch or a bad witch?” Glinda the Good Witch of the North asked Dorothy after a twister brought her to the Land of Oz. The first *Wizard of Oz* audiences in 1939 may have only been acquainted with witches like the Weird Sisters from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and would not have been accustomed to the beautiful woman in a bubble. Glinda was a definite change from the tradition of portraying solely the bad mother in forms of literature and film. The archetype of literary witches is based in the Early Modern witch trials. Shakespeare’s three witches were inspired by various witch folklore from across Europe (Purkiss 209). Witches are traditionally the bad mothers, but Rowling incorporated a different type of witch as mother. Rowling took the theme of maternity and witchcraft and created characters that were not in the traditional realm of harmful, devilish witches. The bad mother harms children and serves men, sexually and under their command, making them overall antagonistic characters in the *Harry Potter* series. In contrast to Umbridge and Bellatrix, the good mothers put their children above all else. Rowling by no means created this archetype, but her characters of Molly Weasley, Lily Potter, and even Narcissa Malfoy are strong, independent, powerful characters as well as fiercely loving and nurturing mothers and challenge the archetype of bad mother while also exemplifying the importance of maternal nurture in the entire series.

As historians have pointed out and I have examined in the previous chapter, the idea of maternity played an important role in historic accusations of witchcraft and was commonly viewed in a threatening sense towards patriarchy. This maternal power plays a particular role in the profession of historical midwifery. Purkiss writes that midwives were thought to use magic to protect the mother and child during labor. A midwife's knowledge was highly respected and trusted by the women in the birthing room (Purkiss 101). The threat of their knowledge led to midwives being suspected of witchcraft. However, midwives also acted as somewhat of a professional opinion when searching for physical signs of being a witch like having a witch's teat (Purkiss 21). While the image of the "bad mother" is easy to identify and find parallels in historical accusations of witchcraft and the *Harry Potter* series, the midwife, and particularly feminist historians' analyses of her, resonates with the "good mothers" of the *Harry Potter* series.

Early Modern accusations of witches as bad mothers appear in the characters of Umbridge and Bellatrix, but a different historical interpretation of Early Modern witches is a stronger theme throughout the entire series. After gaining suffrage in the early twentieth century, women in Western society erupted in a movement in the 1970s as they sought equality in the work place and moving out of being exclusively in the domestic realm. A product of this "second wave" feminist era, Rowling's good mothers relate to this interpretation of Early Modern midwives but also give strong, loving, nurturing mothers, who also happen to be witches. Rowling has stated that mothers are extremely important in the series, particularly in the protection of Harry on his heroic journey. This

“good mother” Rowling presents compares to the historic midwife, or “healer witch,” in accordance to a second wave feminist historian’s definition and argument of witches as midwives.

Diane Purkiss opens her 1996 book *The Witch in History* with the “Myth of the Burning Times,” which looks back at Early Modern witchcraft cases under the lens of Second Wave Feminism of the 1970s. Purkiss writes, “The figure of the healer-witch reflects assumptions about the Middle Ages: the midwife-herbalist-healer-witch seems a spectacular collage of everything which feminist historians and others see as the opposite of medieval patriarchy” (19). In a time when many women felt like they were still fighting against patriarchy, they easily may have found solace in finding that for centuries innocent, strong, intelligent women have been challenged because of their sex. Midwives were central to women’s health in the Early Modern era. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, two feminist political writers published *Witches, Midwives, and Healers: a History of Woman Healers*, which explains the history of women in health professions, including Early Modern midwives. The authors clearly explain that they are not historians, but rather are examining the Early Modern “healer witch” from modern women’s perspectives. They state that midwives commonly served not only women but also particularly poor peasant women, often coming from that class themselves (Ehrenreich and English). Their knowledge was based in herbal remedies and closely related to modern knowledge of anatomy, while emerging male doctors still relied on superstitions and sometimes even prayer, as the patriarchal Catholic Church still had influence over much of society. Ehrenreich and English’s main argument was that the

patriarchal Church and authority targeted midwives⁴ because they were an organized group of peasant women helping other peasant women with health issues related to sex, i.e. pregnancy and labor. Additionally, their knowledge came from nature and what would become the basis of modern science rather than religion and faith. In an era where women's reproductive rights were still being challenged, it is not surprising that Ehrenreich and English's 1973 pamphlet searches for affirmation that patriarchal oppression against women's knowledge and control of their own bodies has been occurring for centuries.

Purkiss examines this work under scrutiny but acknowledges that it was not meant as a historical analysis. Purkiss takes this feminist argument under a large scope she refers to as "The Burning Times Myth" which attempted to promote feminism but actually portrayed these Early Modern midwives as helpless female victims of patriarchy. Purkiss states that a popular theory is of the Early Modern midwife who merely wanted to help women through dangerous labor with their obtained knowledge of female anatomy and to back up this theory, will often cite the *Malleus Maleficarum* (21). A lengthy writing used as an inquisitor's guide from the fifteenth century, the *Malleus Maleficarum* analyzes witchcraft and the judicial process of the trials. The writing targets midwives specifically stating that the Devil attacks infants in the womb through the hands of women, because as noted previously, the general idea was that as much evil as women were conducting, they still had to have a man behind them. The *Malleus* states,

⁴ Although, other historians show that midwives themselves were rarely accused of witchcraft, rather their knowledge of female anatomy was used to help decipher "Devil's Marks" on accused witches (Purkiss 21)]

“No one does more harm to the Catholic faith than midwives.” The *Malleus* goes on to give a specific account of a midwife “doing evil” to a pregnant woman, which the pregnant woman herself gave testimony to, another example of “women v. women” accusations as noted in the previous chapter. While the *Malleus* accuses midwives of being under the direction of the devil and seeking to harm women, some historians fervently deny this accusation of maleficium. Midwives, sometimes referred to as “healer-witches,” were never men, and embodied traditional feminine roles of being maternal and domestic.

Healing and midwifery are described as essentially female roles, but as Ehrenreich and English argue men soon entered and attempted to dominate and control the medical profession. Women in medicine in the Early Modern era faced a battle of nature versus culture. Traditionally, women possessed an intuition, maternity, knowledge, and the power of giving life, but lived in a culture of oppressive patriarchy. As explained in the previous chapter, J.K. Rowling has created characters aligning with the historical witch as bad mother. She has also presented female characters that align more closely with the historic midwife. Writing in a post-second-wave-feminism era of the 1990s and early 2000s, Rowling has created several female characters that may seem a paradox to Early Modern men accusing women of witchcraft; they are equally maternal while proving powerful through the eyes of a female author.

One of the best examples of an Early Modern midwife making a symbolic appearance in the Harry Potter series comes in the character of Molly Weasley. Purkiss

describes Ehrenreich and English's midwife witch as, "...an utterly innocent victim. She was us as we should have been; she was the perfect nurturing mother that we were not, the useful woman who cared nothing for orthodox power, but who had at her disposal awesome knowledge" (19). Molly is far from perfect, but she does have this maternal knowledge where she seemingly can keep the family dynamic strong when the world around the Weasley family is falling apart. Molly is not only the most present mother in the series, being mother to seven of the main and secondary characters, but acts as a constant presence of maternal love, guidance, and protection for her own children as well as others, including Harry and Hermione. Julie Walters, the actress who portrays Molly, stated, "Apart from the three main characters...Mrs. Weasley is the greatest force for good." In the midst of the chaos of the last few books, Mrs. Weasley keeps not only her family in tact, but provides as much stability and comfort for Harry as possible. From the beginning of Harry's journey to Hogwarts, readers see Molly helping Harry understand Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, all the way to the final Battle of Hogwarts where Molly fiercely defends her own daughter in a magical duel against Bellatrix Lestrange. Molly appears in the first book in the series and from her first appearance forward, she is a staple of the domestic sphere in the series.

Midwives and healers worked within homes mostly rather than established clinics or hospitals, which made them very much a domestic presence. Purkiss quotes Starhawk's, a neopagan feminist writer and activist who describes herself as a "modern witch," fictional example of the healer-witch's domesticity as, "The old woman carries a

basket of herbs and roots she has dug...culled the herbs and brought them back to dry...her hands are healing hands, they can turn a child in the womb; her murmuring voice can charm away pain, can croon the restless to sleep” (20). The domesticity of the midwife through the collection of herbs in this construction is central to Starhawk’s ideology of the domestic nature of women being respected and upheld in a community rather than forced upon them. The midwife here is once again portrayed as truly good and nurturing for those far beyond her own family; she is a nurturer for a whole community, as Molly acts as for The Order of the Phoenix and Dumbledore’s Army, an underground group of Hogwarts students wanting to fight Dolores Umbridge. While Molly is not necessarily a medical technician, her nature of love and protection of others is innate to her character. In *Order of the Phoenix*, Sirius Black, Harry’s godfather, tries to argue with Molly about Harry claiming that he is not her own child, with Molly retorting, “He’s as good as” (120). This quasi-adoption began with the simple act of explaining the magic Platform and later that year sending him a homemade Christmas sweater, whether or not she knew he would not receive any presents from his relatives. After severely scolding her sons for sneaking out, she welcomed Harry into her home and took him back-to-school shopping with the rest of her children. As the Order of the Phoenix, a group of wizards and witches banding against the rise of Lord Voldemort, reemerges during Harry’s fifth year, Molly, a member of this powerful group, takes it upon herself to cook for the large group and clean the headquarters. Humorous accounts of Molly’s gardening and ridding of the gnomes reflect on this assumed connection to nature women possess, as Starhawk believes. In an interview discussing the women of the series, Rowling

addresses a similar issue that Starhawk presents in how to balance domesticity and professionalism. Rowling describes an incident in which a journalist referred to Mrs. Weasley as “just a mother” (“Women of Harry Potter”). Rowling defended her feminist views and stated that just because a woman makes a conscious choice to be a stay-at-home mother does not mean that is her entire existence. Molly is defined by much more than traditional gender roles. Although Molly is predominantly viewed in the domestic sphere, Rowling makes a conscious effort (as seen in the Great Hall scene) to prove that this character is much more than “just a housewife.”

During the battle in the Great Hall, Ginny Weasley, Molly’s youngest, is nearly killed by Bellatrix. Molly charges at Bellatrix, ready to kill. When others try to help Molly, she refuses, wanting to be the one to end Bellatrix’s life. This scene is where interpretations of the midwife-healer-witch as calm, gentle, and loving do not apply to Molly Weasley. She is completely animalistic in her defense of her child, and all of her children, especially as Bellatrix taunts the recent loss of Molly’s son Fred. Any image of sweet housewife Molly Weasley is left behind, as Rowling wanted. Julie Walters, who portrays Molly, states, “It comes from her womb, that feeling of defending her child. She’s already lost one. So it’s the mother, the lion, defending her babies. It’s unstoppable. I doubt if that would have taken place if it had been a man writing it” (“Women of Harry Potter”). The battle scene in the Great Hall is specifically monumental because of Molly Weasley. Molly is typically a means of support for the fight rather than a fighter herself. Molly acts as the “battlefield medic” rather than the soldier. She even

has a clock in her kitchen that monitors where each member of her family is at all times so she can watch for their safety. In the Great Hall, Molly is no longer on the sidelines of the fight but forcefully attacks because she feels the threat of her child at stake.

Starhawk's depiction of the midwife-healer-witch introduces another characteristic that is at the center of why mothers are important in the Harry Potter series. Starhawk's constructed witch fears prosecution from the local male dominated authority but chooses not to flee into hiding because the women of the community need her, particularly for giving birth. Purkiss states, "In turning the witch into a secular martyr, Starhawk reinforces the notion that women must sacrifice themselves for others" (22). The midwife witch is presented as a woman who will do anything to help others, this "good mother" in contrast to the "bad mother." This type of sacrifice is what defines maternal nurture. Not just sacrificing for a child, because we see other characters in the series sacrifice, but mothers putting their children's safety above all else.

One of the first instances of a mother's sacrifice is at the very beginning of Harry's story. Flashbacks in *The Deathly Hallows* give insight into what really happened the night Harry's parents were killed and he became "The Boy Who Lived." Voldemort had entered the Potters' home as Harry's mother, Lily, ran up the stairs with him, while his father, James, attempted to fight off Voldemort. Lily attempted to barricade herself into the nursery, and when Voldemort entered anyway, being a dark but extremely powerful wizard, she threw herself in front of the crib. She begged him to kill her instead of her child. She refused to move, despite knowing he could physically or magically

move or harm her. This moment shows the difference of maternal love from other types of sacrifice in the series. James, although he does inevitably die for his family, does not seemingly make that conscious decision. He is trying to protect, thinking he may have some chance against Voldemort. Lily makes the distinct action of physically standing in front of her child and telling Voldemort to kill her instead. Rowling gave this example in an interview by explaining that technically, Lily had a choice. James was going to be murdered anyway, but Lily had a moment where she could have saved herself, and chose to do everything in her being to protect Harry. Her refusal cost her her life, but inevitably saved her child, and this sacrifice is at the center of each and every detail of the plot of the Harry Potter series. Lily is not a character that the audience gets to meet except for flashbacks, but she is the ultimate symbol of maternal nurture. Lily is the setup of maternal nurture being and overarching theme of the series. The reason Harry is famously dubbed, “The Boy Who Lived,” is because of Lily’s sacrifice. By dying for her child, he was protected for his entire childhood, and Voldemort could not harm him. Her love and its protection is described by Dumbledore at the end of *The Sorcerer’s Stone*:

“Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn’t realize that love as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign...to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin...[For Quirrell,] it was agony to touch a person marked by something so good” (299).

Rowling further explains how important this sacrifice is in *The Order of the Phoenix*.

Dumbledore explains to Harry,

“But I knew too where Voldemort was weak. And so I made my decision. You would be protected by an ancient magic of which he knows, which he despises, and which he has always, therefore, underestimated—to his cost. I am speaking, of course, of the fact that your mother died to save you. She gave you a lingering protection he never expected, a protection that flows in your veins to this day...your mother’s sacrifice made the bond of blood the strongest shield I could give you” (836).

Rowling describes this sacrifice as an ancient magic, this mother’s innate love of protecting her children, as more powerful than any other kind of magic that witches and wizards could fathom. In this example of Lily sacrificing herself, the power is based in her maternal instinct. This magic is innately female, as Purkiss explains and feminist historians often argue. Midwives and healer-witches are never men, because this love and nurture is so natural to women. Rowling takes this idea and shows how this makes women powerful. Lily’s protection is the reason Harry becomes the “Chosen One” to rid the world of the most evil wizard. Once Harry understands how the magic his mother used saved his life, he understands that to protect his loved ones in the final Battle of Hogwarts in *Deathly Hallows*, he must willingly die at the hands of Voldemort. Harry inevitably comes back to life still because of his mother’s sacrifice. When Voldemort took Harry’s blood in *Goblet of Fire*, part of Lily’s sacrificial magic in Harry’s blood lived on with Voldemort, meaning as long as Voldemort lived, Harry would too. Harry

did come back to life after being killed in the Forbidden Forest and explains to Voldemort why none of his spells were harming the Defenders of Hogwarts. Harry's sacrifice, a love learned from his mother, defended all those he cared for, defending the first place he truly called home.

Starhawk created a martyr midwife and Ehrenreich and English presented a midwife standing up to patriarchy and risking persecution. Rowling created Narcissa Malfoy. Narcissa, mother to Draco and wife of Lucius, does not actually appear in the series until the sixth book, *The Half-Blood Prince*, in which she enlists the help of Snape to protect her son and carry out a mission Voldemort has assigned young Draco. While Narcissa is far from the all-loving, caring mother we see in Molly Weasley, she also has a fierce defense when it comes to her child. In *Deathly Hallows*, Narcissa and Lucius join, seemingly under pure terror for their lives, Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest with the rest of the Death Eaters, waiting for Harry to sacrifice himself. After striking Harry with the Killing Curse and passing out himself, Voldemort orders Narcissa to check if he was alive.

“He could hear the woman’s fast breathing, her long hair tickled his face. He knew that she could feel the steady pounding of life against his ribs.

‘Is Draco alive? Is he in the castle?’

The whisper was barely audible; her lips were an inch from his ear, her head bent so low that her long hair shielded his face from the onlookers.

‘Yes,’ he breathed back.

He felt the hand on his chest contract; her nails pierced him. Then it was withdrawn. She had sat up.

‘He is dead!’ Narcissa Malfoy called to the watchers” (726).

Rowling writes that Harry understood that Narcissa knew the only way she would get back to the castle was as part of Voldemort’s victorious army. She had no care whether Voldemort was triumphant; she merely wanted to get to her child. Narcissa took a massive risk and acted far more bravely than her husband had shown in any scene in the series where he feigned confidence. Narcissa stood in front of the most powerful dark wizard and lied to his face when he asked her a question. It would have taken just one other person’s examination of Harry to lead to her certain immediate death, but she knew the only way to get to her child quickly was to lie.

Narcissa is a further example of how, like Umbridge, maternal nurture is a determining characteristic of a person. Narcissa is a Death Eater and prejudiced but her maternal nurture overpowers her and she saves the life of not only her own child but the life of Harry as well. Like Molly, Narcissa shows too that maternal nurture does not make a person perfect and infallible. Narcissa is still a Death Eater and did not necessarily choose to save Harry’s life because he was *a* child, but rather she saved his life because it would hasten the process to get to *her* child. Rowling made a conscious reflection to the beginning of Harry’s story, where a mother sacrifices herself, to the end of his story, with another mother risking her life to save her child. Helen McCrory, the actress portraying Narcissa in the films commented, “It’s interesting that J.K. Rowling

would choose to do that. That the woman who would risk her own life to save her own son understands loyalty and understands preservation of life” (“Women of Harry Potter”). Rowling stated that she wanted to “close the circle,” making “quite a conscious echo” to the beginning of the story: Harry’s story starts by being saved by a mother, and at the end of his story, it is a mother who saves him once again.

Narcissa’s sacrifice is reminiscent of Ehrenreich and English’s depiction of the male dominated medical field. These women were, as they are portrayed in this telling of history and many tellings by other feminist historians studying Early Modern witch-hunts, under the control of an oppressive patriarchy. From the Church to the men entering and “actively taking over” the previously female oriented medical field, Ehrenreich and English argue that this was a fight against women in general. Their writing suggests the men’s fear of women fighting back and their knowledge that made them more powerful in the medical world, so they were tainted as evil workers of the devil and suppressed.

Narcissa’s three words of “He is dead,” can be read as an act of defiance against a patriarchal oppressor, seen in Voldemort. In that moment, Narcissa was protecting her own child, and someone she may have recognized as someone else’s child, rather than an enemy. Narcissa is not the only woman to stand up against a male authority figure in the defense of a child. After Harry snuck back into Hogwarts right before the Final Battle, the Death Eaters Amycus and Alecto Carrow, “teachers” at the school under the new regime of Voldemort, threaten students in front of Professor Minerva McGonagall. Professor McGonagall never had children of her own, as Rowling has explained, but she

has been a strong force of maternity, especially for Harry, at Hogwarts. Besides keeping him in line and even purchasing his first Quidditch broom, McGonagall shows, particularly in the last book, her true maternal power of defending children. Fearing Voldemort's anger, Amycus Carrow tries to make up a lie framing some of the students, hoping to blame them and divert Voldemort's wrath. McGonagall states, "...let me make one thing very clear. You are not going to pass off your many ineptitudes on the students of Hogwarts. I shall not permit it" (593). As Carrow tries to physically intimidate her, "She refused to back away, but looked down on him as if he were something disgusting she had found stuck to a lavatory seat" (593). Moments later, Snape appeared, threatened Harry, and McGonagall began to fiercely duel him. In an early edition of the film adaptation screenplay, Harry was the one fighting Snape in this scene and Rowling did not approve the change. She said, "In the book, it was Minerva McGonagall who fought back and for me, it was very important that she did that" ("Women of Harry Potter"). With Snape as Headmaster and the Carrows as Dark Arts professors, McGonagall is the shining light for good at the school and acts in defense of all the students of Hogwarts as if they were her own children against oppression and evil doing.

The woman versus woman battle was a notion in history described in the previous chapter, but it also occurred in the birth room, providing a different image of who the midwife was. Purkiss writes,

"Medical and popular knowledge alike affirmed the power of the mother's thoughts and feelings to shape the child in utero; by usurping her place, the witch

or her familiar could do the same. These thoughts and feelings are ideologically overdetermined: the mother must avoid unfeminine feelings of rage, frustration and fury if she is to avoid miscarriage. These feelings characterize the witch as the opposite of what the early modern woman should be. Again, the witch is the dark other of the early modern woman, expressing and acting on desires that other women must repress to construct their identities as mothers” (102).

“Rage, frustration, and fury” describe Bellatrix on any given day, but especially in this scene, and what is interesting is these emotions’ connection to miscarriage according to Early Modern obstetrics. Molly too holds these emotions as she is fighting Bellatrix, while also holding the grief of recently losing a child and the fear of losing others. The scene in the Great Hall in which Bellatrix is ultimately killed is the epitome of the underlying statement of the role of maternity. The women in Rowling’s series are not all evil-doing, bad mothers, but the good mothers are not weak simply because they are not using their powers for evil. Molly shows how the power of maternal protection is more powerful than Bellatrix’s cruelest curse of torture. Her fear for her child led to her to destroy this other woman. This fear was one of the leading reasons behind accusations in the Early Modern era; mothers of sick or dead children who had no other outlet to force blame than another person. This battle shows the not only good versus evil, but how these multiple theories of Early Modern witches from various points in history are represented in the series. There are bad mothers, there are good mothers, but they are all unarguably powerful women.

Chapter 3: “Non-Mothers” and Maternal Nurture

The past two chapters have analyzed how maternal nurture is not only a dominating theme in J.K. Rowling’s series that acts as a measurement for the characters’ morality but was also a legal and social judgment for Early Modern women. In the Early Modern era, being a mother was the pinnacle of being a woman. A woman’s value was often placed in her ability to produce children and mother them. Many witchcraft accusations involved reproduction and sexuality. In the realm of Harry Potter, these themes are applicable to the adult women of the series. These themes are directly correlated, like Bellatrix’s implied sexual relationship with Voldemort, or indirectly correlated in the way that even though McGonagall has no children, she is a good mother figure because of her aggressive protection of students for whom she most cares. From Bellatrix to Molly, from Umbridge to Narcissa, the women in the *Harry Potter* series produce a variety of images of what it means to be a witch, mother, or woman. Maternal nurture, both traditional and perverse, acts as a strong criterion of the morality of the women in the series. Positive maternal love, as expressed with Lily, proves to be the literal saving grace of Harry throughout the series, and the theme of maternal love was quite intentional. Having lost her mother and becoming a mother around the time she began writing, Rowling shows maternity and maternal nurture through as strong themes in the series.

However prominent these women are, the theme of maternal nurture and power can extend beyond women. The series is based not in the superiority of women, but in the equality of the sexes. The protagonist is a young boy, the main antagonist is an old man, and several other men play hugely important roles in Harry's life. Some of these men too express love in various ways and nurture Harry through his saga. In addition to the men, children are prominent figures in the series, considering nearly the entire series takes place at a school. However, if maternal love is innately female, can it still be a common theme throughout the series, regardless of gender of character?

What makes a mother a mother? By definition, it is a woman who has a child. Early Modern period research shows that the term "mother" can apply to women who do not have their own children but in how they relate to children. Bad mothers seek to harm children or nurture other childlike imps in perverse ways, usually in some association with the devil. Good mothers nurture in a more traditional way, protect, and sacrifice for children, putting their children's wellbeing above their own.

What is a witch? Rowling's definition is much more simple than history's in which accusations get convoluted. In Rowling's created world, a witch is simply a woman who has magical powers. Gender is the essential factor that separates a witch from a wizard, as Rowling has stated: "What's interesting about the wizarding world is when you take physical strength out of the equation, a woman can fight just the same as a man can fight. A woman can do magic just the same as a man can do magic" ("Women of Harry Potter"). By this logic, can men have feminine characteristics, particularly that

of nurturing? Can this logic go as far as expanding the definition of mother beyond the female adult?

Harry grows close to many men over the series, some of whom he finds as pseudo-family members. Hagrid is the first person Harry meets from the Magical World, tells him he is a wizard, and gives as much insight into the world into which Harry was born as he can. Although physically Hagrid is quite anti-feminine, being extremely large, hairy, and gruff, he is fiercely defensive of those for whom he cares. Hagrid brought Harry to Privet Drive the night his parents were killed and grew an obvious emotional attachment in even that short commute. As Harry's Uncle Vernon insults Dumbledore, Hagrid threatens Vernon as well as his son Dudley for eating Harry's birthday cake (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Warner Brothers, 2001). This suggests that while Hagrid loves immensely, he still does not have a problem with subtly harming children he does not like. After Harry is "killed" in the Forbidden Forest, Hagrid weeps as he is forced to carry him back to the castle. Hagrid's devotion to Harry and many of the other students exhibits the imagery of a mother strongly compared to the majority of the other "non-mothers" in the series. Hagrid's nurturance of all beings is the self-sacrifice we see in the good mothers. Hagrid is surely fallible but his intention is always to protect and never to harm.

The next example evokes how Hagrid also acts as a paradigm of the Early Modern bad mother in regards to animals and familiars, although the aforementioned examples show that Hagrid is inherently good. Rowling's use of Hagrid's relationship

with animals is a paradigm of the use of animal familiars by Early Modern witches. The Early Modern witches were accused of using animal familiars to do the witch's evil bidding, including harming neighbors and their own animals (Willis 55). These familiars were a leading cause for accusation and persecution. The use of familiars was an accusation more common in the village level rather than the gentry and elite level. The familiars acted as children for the bad mothers who were too old to have infants or those who purposefully neglected their children.

Hagrid, as Hogwarts Gamekeeper, has shown a love of magical creatures his entire life. Hagrid was expelled for keeping what was thought to be an evil monster of a spider. Before the spider, Aragog, could be killed, Hagrid snuck him out of the castle and into the Forbidden Forest for protection. In *Sorcerer's Stone*, Hagrid obtains a Dragon Egg and nurtures it until it hatches. As "Norbert" hatches and looks at Hagrid, he cries at the dragon's beauty and refers to himself as Norbert's "mummy." Hagrid almost always has some sort of magical creature for a pet that he cares for almost as his own child. These creatures are usually taken away due to their danger, reflecting the perverse use of familiars by Early Modern witches as their own children. Although the animals themselves are dangerous, Hagrid's intentions with the animals were not malicious. Similarly, Hagrid's pet spider Aragog was the cause of Hagrid being ostracized by the magical community. Aragog was wrongly believed to have killed a young girl at Hogwarts. Tom Riddle (Voldemort's birth name) falsely reported the attack, which resulted in Hagrid's expulsion from Hogwarts and his being banned from using a wand

by the Ministry of Magic. Hagrid did not set the animal upon the girl, and it is highly doubtful Early Modern women set animal familiars upon children or neighbors either. Hagrid's persecution parallels the bad mother trope, regardless of the truth of the accusation.

While Hagrid does not use the animals for ill, Voldemort's snake Nagini is a paradigm of the Early Modern familiars. Nagini is a huge snake that Voldemort orders to kill others, Muggles and magical folk alike. It has also turned into a Horcrux, a deeply dark magic that splits one's soul and places it in another object or being. Nagini attacked the Muggle caretaker in *Goblet of Fire*, Arthur Weasley in *Order of the Phoenix*, and other enemies of Voldemort, including Harry and Hermione in Godric's Hollow, where Harry's own parents were killed. As a Parselmouth, a wizard who can speak to snakes, Voldemort had a special connection to snakes. The attacks Voldemort ordered were not only for sadistic pleasure and ridding himself of threats, but as a way to feed his pet Nagini. Voldemort refers to Charity Burbage, a woman he kidnaps and kills in *Deathly Hallows* as "dinner" (22) for Nagini. Early Modern witches were often accused of feeding their own blood to their animal familiars. The mystery of female anatomy led to the belief that women could turn blood into breast milk to give a life source to infants; the witch used this ability in a perverse, unnatural way to feed blood to her familiars. The harming of oneself or others to feed these creatures is one of the telling differences between Hagrid's animals and Voldemort's Nagini. Hagrid does not harm others to feed any of his pets, although occasionally his pets do injure him, which he readily forgives.

Voldemort sees no issue with harming others to feed Nagini (as a Horcrux, an extension of himself) but would never harm himself for Nagini. Self-sacrifice is a characteristic of the good mothers, which Voldemort falls far from.

Although they are men, Voldemort and Hagrid possess qualities akin to both the bad and good mothers of the Early Modern period. One of the first wizards present in Harry's life and who inevitably became one of his closest confidants was Albus Dumbledore. Dumbledore is described with similar imagery to that of the legendary Merlin (Rowling even states that Merlin attended Hogwarts—she implies he was a Slytherin) or other magicians/ "magic-men" described in literature throughout history. Purkiss briefly mentions *Dr Faustus* and John Dee, the court magician of Elizabeth, and how these men's magic was respected, while women were invading the men's realm of knowledge if they sought to practice magic. The Merlin type is "powerful and unequivocally prophetic" (Purkiss 184). But unlike this type of sorcerer in history, Dumbledore wasn't created to undermine female counterparts and defend the male gender in the practice of magic. "Cunning women," as described in the previous chapter were similar practitioners of magic to the Merlin archetype but were never trusted as reliable sources. The male sorcerer was specifically avoiding femininity in his practice of magic (Purkiss 184).

Contrarily, Dumbledore, although a powerful wizard, is not superior because of his gender. He regularly puts his trust in other witches, particularly McGonagall. He acts as a strong parental figure, counselor, and confidant to Harry throughout his adolescence,

providing as much protection as possible. Once Lily had died, leaving the power of her love to protect Harry, Dumbledore continued to watch over him. Dumbledore had the insight to bring the orphaned infant to a home where his mother's blood, the blood that ran through his veins and protected him, resided, despite being outside the magical realm and where he would grow up under the neglect and abuse of his aunt and uncle.

Dumbledore knew that although the circumstances were not ideal, the spell Lily had placed through her sacrifice would best be upheld with her sister. When Petunia accepted Harry into her home, the spell was sealed. Dumbledore's love for Harry is best described in one of the last chapters of *Deathly Hallows* after Harry has died and awakens in some afterlife version of King's Cross Station with Dumbledore. Dumbledore immediately wraps Harry in an embrace, comforting him in a moment of confusion, praising him for being "wonderful and brave" (775). In this chapter, Dumbledore fully explains how love protected Harry, even in this moment. While Lily's sacrifice was the leading act of protection and sacrifice, the ultimate nurture of a good mother, Dumbledore acted selflessly until the very end of his life for the good of the wizarding world, but particularly Harry. Harry may have been protected by Lily and inherited her goodness, but Dumbledore was a constant figure in Harry's teenage, conscience-developing years, and arguably learned self-sacrifice, a trait continually seen in the good mothers, from Dumbledore. As stated previously, Harry sacrifices himself for the protection of his loved ones, mimicking Lily's sacrifice for him.

Harry's sacrifice was something that his mother's love gave him strength to do. Voldemort, lacking early love from his mother (which will be explained momentarily), never could fathom anything beyond total control and self-preservation. Other images of maternity in "non-mothers" include, like the "good mothers" of the previous chapter, sacrifice. Dumbledore not only gave up his good health and eventual life for Harry, but other children as well. When Draco Malfoy is instructed by Voldemort to kill Dumbledore, Dumbledore plans his own death with the assistance of Professor Snape. Rather than having the trauma of committing murder thrust upon a child, or the probable death Draco feared if he failed, Dumbledore sacrificed himself and in turn protected a child by having Snape kill him instead, seemingly upholding Voldemort's wishes.

Snape too acts as a protector of Harry and other children throughout the series. From throwing himself in front of Harry, Ron, and Hermione to protect them from a werewolf to giving his life, Snape acted out of love for Lily and in turn honored her love for Harry throughout the entire series, although it is neither evident to Harry nor the reader until the final chapters. Snape, who loved Lily through their childhood and adolescence, agreed to help Dumbledore protect Harry. He shows a strong disdain for Harry throughout the books, punishing him harshly for misdeeds and favoring Harry's enemy, Malfoy, yet even in his sternness, he was working for the protection of Harry. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry learns of Snape's relationship to Lily, how Snape asked Dumbledore to protect Lily after Voldemort decided to kill the infant, and Harry watches Snape die as he lied to Voldemort to save him. Still, while Snape acted to protect Harry,

it was continually out of his love for Lily, honoring her nurture for Harry, rather than maternity of his own accord.

While protection, sacrifice, love, and nurturing have all shown to be characteristics of maternal nurture in the series, not every instance of these actions make the character maternal, nor do they make the character a complete “anti-mother” like Bellatrix. In the *Harry Potter* series, women are willing to protect the child at all costs and above everything else which I believe is the truest definition of maternity. With the exception of Hagrid, none of the men show the level of protection and sacrifice that the women show. Some other “non-mother” characters love the children in the series and are definitively “good,” but still lack maternity. Harry’s godfather Sirius loves him immensely but is reckless. While Molly forbade the idea of using Harry as bait for Voldemort in *Order of the Phoenix*, Sirius considered it (120). Sirius is willing to dangle Harry in front of Voldemort although he wants to protect Harry. Molly, being a mother, is not compromising on the safety of “her” child. Nymphadora Tonks, who first appears as a young free spirited witch in *Order of the Phoenix* becomes a mother in *Deathly Hallows*, maintains her ferocity to fight alongside the Order but takes precaution with her child, Teddy. Remus Lupin can be nurturing, like giving Harry chocolate after a near Dementor attack, but can be cold and distant, however differently than McGonagall, who, as has been described, is not overtly sweet and loving, but offers biscuits and stunning spells to Harry’s defense when needed.

Although Dumbledore as Harry knows him shows some signs of maternity, he himself admits he did not have the level of affection for his siblings that his mother did. He loved them tremendously but lacked the love to give up his life to care for them, as his mother Kendra had before she died. Dumbledore's love for even Harry was not fully realized until after Dumbledore grew to know Harry. In the beginning of the series Dumbledore views Harry more as a valuable tool in the fight against Voldemort. While some of the men, particularly Professor Dumbledore, show characteristics of maternal nurture, the instincts and full force of the specific type of love is not nearly as present as within the female characters. Whether the female characters have children or not, show perverse nurturance, harm, or traditional love, the level of their womanhood is unmatched by the men in regards to how they treat children particularly. Maternal love is a continuous theme in the book, but is best exemplified in the women, strengthening the importance of these already vibrant and powerful women in the series.

The presence of maternal nurture has shown to positively affect characters, even as far as to save lives. Contrarily, the absence of maternal nurture causes hugely dire effects on certain characters. Dolores Umbridge and Lord Voldemort have eerily similar core characters, as briefly described in the first chapter. Both have a perverse idea of control and even love, although one could argue the only entities either truly cares for is power and superiority. Rowling recently released new information on the early life and background of Umbridge on the Potter fan website "Pottermore", in which once again, Umbridge and Voldemort's lives hold parallels. Umbridge's mother was a Muggle, a

non-magic person, and is described as “flighty and untidy” (“Pottermore”). Umbridge held such disdain for her mother that she never formed a close bond with her and stayed with her Wizard father when her mother left in Umbridge’s adolescence.

Similarly, Voldemort’s mother was not present in her child’s life. Merope Gaunt Riddle died after giving birth to Tom Riddle, who eventually took the alias Lord Voldemort. Merope conceived Tom by placing his father under the spell of a love potion, leaving Tom unable to truly love anyone or anything. Having been abandoned and raised in an institution, Tom would use his magic to harm other orphans. The children’s foundation of Lumos states that children raised in institutions are forty times more likely to have a criminal record, as the lack of affection and the immensely important factor of maternal love can stifle brain development and hinder a child’s ability to determine right from wrong. While Lumos focuses in on Eastern Europe, J.K. Rowling, Lumos’s founder, incorporated her research through the foundation into her novels, thus hammering down her theme of the importance of maternal nurture for children. Voldemort, the antagonist and antithesis of Harry, cannot love because he lacks the most innate, basic form of love from his first day of life. A seemingly obvious contradiction to the above argument would be of the title character himself. Harry grew up without his parents and in a household of neglect. However, Harry was so well loved in his first year of life, with or without magic, that James and particularly Lily’s love carries him through his entire life to shape him into “The Chosen One.”

Harry's sacrifice is noticeably reflective of Lily's sacrifice, but being an adolescent boy, does Harry fall under a "mother" trope? The other group of "non-mothers," not adult women, are children. The three main characters grow from eleven year olds when the audience meets them through late adolescence. As two of the three main children are boys and the only girl is obviously not in the realm of being a mother, how do children fit into the theme of maternal nurture in the series? How do children work in the historical instances of magic-users when they were often the victims themselves? Before looking closely at the *Potter* series, take a moment to look at the example of the bad mother in *Hansel and Gretel*. The Brothers Grimm tale has two children, abandoned by their mother, taken in by a witch who seems to be kind and nurturing. The children soon realize she is planning to overfeed and eat them, so they cleverly trick her, eventually killing her in her own oven. Although *Hansel and Gretel* is a nineteenth century German fairytale, it contains similar themes to Early Modern witchcraft accusations and in turn, the mothers of *Harry Potter*. Considering feeding is both nurturing and in the realm of domesticity, food has been closely related to witchcraft and perverse nurturance of the bad mother trope, as stated in the first chapter.

The important part of *Hansel and Gretel* for this chapter is how the children overpower the witch. They use their "power," of outsmarting her and kill her. Children acquiring power has relevance to Early Modern witches. When a woman was accused of harboring a demonic "imp" or familiar (described earlier in this chapter), children were often the lead witnesses, sometimes the own children of the accused. Willis states that

two arguments can be made as to why children focused on these “other children” of their mother: firstly, the imp could be viewed as the child’s evil twin and the child sought to protect its mother; secondly, the imp could be viewed as a preferred, rival child and the child sought revenge for its mother’s neglect. The issue of neglect resonates with Voldemort’s childhood, as explained earlier. Merope has the qualities of a bad mother, including a forbidden, unnatural relationship in which she bewitches a man. Voldemort’s abandonment led him to resenting his mother and later killing his father.

While some children did act as accusers, giving them some power, the overarching role of children in witchcraft trials was that of victim. The leading source of accusations was because of children’s illnesses and deaths. Rowling counters this tradition in a paradigm similar to the Brothers Grimm’s *Hansel and Gretel*. In *Harry Potter*, children fight adults who seek to harm. Children *succeed* in fighting adults who seek to harm. In *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry, Hermione, and Ron organize a student group called “Dumbledore’s Army” to fight against Umbridge’s lack of Defense against the Dark Arts. The *Potter* series goes beyond other children’s stories in which a simple moral lesson is learned at the end of the tale, but children are given the ability to challenge adults through skill and intellect. As done with the trope of the good mother, Rowling allows traditional roles to be circumvented in her realm; witches can be loving, good, nurturing mothers, and children can be their own clever, brave heroes.

Traditional gender roles are sometimes skewed in the *Harry Potter* series. Rowling has created a world where gender is only occasionally a topic of debate as to

why someone's capabilities are questioned. While gendered characteristics can be fluid, certain characteristics are shown to be stronger in some characters than others. Many of the men have feminine or maternal qualities, but they rarely dominate their entire character. Although the roles of authority break boundaries in the way of children overpowering adults and women having positions of power, maternal power is not necessarily the type of power acquired, particularly by children. Harry learns love and sacrifice, but although those traits have repeatedly been established as qualities of maternal nurturance, they are not causal of maternal nurturance. While maternal nurture is an overarching theme in the series and shows in many examples in men, the trait is still predominantly in women.

Conclusion

Maternal nurture and the “witch as mother” in the *Harry Potter* series are tropes that have their roots in the Early Modern period. The series is clearly set, however, in a fantastic version of Rowling’s contemporary world, so how did she think that this historical association of the witch with motherhood would affect a twenty-first century audience?

Although *Harry Potter* is a children’s series, its audience is especially broad. One of the series’ greatest accomplishments is the appeal that it holds for readers of all ages. For older readers, Rowling’s revision of negative associations between witchcraft and femininity may suggest social progress toward eliminating sexism and gender inequality. For young girls and boys, the series shows that all types of characters can be smart and strong, good or evil. Their young readers in turn, might interpret these as influential role models girls reading about every character from Hermione and Luna Lovegood, a quirky student who is not afraid to share her bizarre theories, to the many adult women I have mentioned have contemporary literary models to idolize. What started as a “book for boys” has produced some of the most recognizable characters standing for strength, goodness, and intelligence. Hermione shows young girls that raising your hand in class is not something to fear, Luna shows that being different is just fine, and Ginny shows that girls can be just as good at sports as boys. The adult female characters show that growing up does not lessen these qualities but strengthens them.

Other modern literary works inspired by historic stories and tropes include the Disney franchise, particularly the princesses who have been marketed towards young girls for almost a century. Over time, the themes and storylines have had to adapt to how society views women. The first Disney Princesses were inspired by The Brothers Grimm fairytales⁵ and played into the “damsel in distress” trope. *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty* all have female protagonists who have little means to save themselves from dangerous situations, from being trapped in the home of an evil stepmother to being comatose. For thirty years, during the rise of the second wave feminist movement, no Disney Princess film was made.⁶ The Princess films made over the last quarter-century feature princesses who are much more independent, in correlation with a stronger presence of women in the work force. For example, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) focuses her energies on reading and saving her father rather than marrying. Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), which is based on another Grimm fairytale, dreams of opening her own business. Literary characters, including film, reflect their time period. Likewise, the women of *Harry Potter* are reflective of late twentieth and twenty-first century women. Although Disney Princesses can be strong and independent, they are primarily looking for a “Happily Ever After” and always seem to obtain it in the end of the story. Young girls see these women and soon believe that the best way for them to reach happiness and self-fulfillment is through a wedding to a wealthy prince.

⁵ *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, and *Cinderella* are all Grimm fairytales and available in Margaret Hunt’s 2011 translation.

⁶ *Sleeping Beauty* was released in 1959 and no other “Princess” film was released until 1989 with *The Little Mermaid*. These release dates can be found on The Walt Disney Company’s website www.disneyanimation.com.

However, the women of *Harry Potter* show that growing up is much more than getting married and having children. Characters like McGonagall and Umbridge hold high positions in their respective fields. At the same time, Rowling's work shows that getting married and having children is still perfectly acceptable as with Molly Weasley. The pull of being a career woman or being a stay-at-home mother is a struggle among many women in today's society. Women fought for jobs in the work force and some women do not have the financial luxury to stay at home, so in roughly two-thirds of families (in America) the mother is the primary or co-bread-winner (Dodd). However, some women, if financially able, choose to stay home with their children. Women are either not driven enough according to modern standards because they are not working or they are considered distant because they do not stay home to raise their children in the traditional caregiver role—the double standard for women in today's culture is mind-boggling. Society may hold up this double standard for women but Rowling's world shows women in a variety of settings from the working woman to the stay-at-home mom, and both are still fully independent, strong women.

In the series' progressive views about “career women,” mothers, and women who fulfill both roles, it advocates a variety of ways in which women can exert influence and power. Additionally, the *Harry Potter* series presents an interesting example of gender equality in men's potential to exercise of maternal nurture. From Hagrid to Molly Weasley, maternal nurture is an overarching theme of the series and not just in particular characters. In positing maternal nurture as a core value in her fantasy world, Rowling

suggests how this “female” characteristic could better any society. While the ability to nurture is available to men in the Harry Potter series, it ultimately reflects on a power that is essentially female and, unlike during the Early Modern period, undeniably positive. Children reading the Harry Potter series will be influenced by the importance of the mothers, which may in turn affect how they will come to view the importance of women in society.

In an interview for the DVD release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I*, Rowling and many of the female cast members discuss the importance of women in the series. Not surprisingly, Rowling goes so far as to identify importance of mothers as a central theme: “Throughout the series [Harry] is such a boy in search of a father, and yet in times of real stress, it’s his mother who is a place of refuge...Lily was representative of safety in a way that a father couldn’t be...Lily’s the person who stood by the cot trying to stop her baby from dying. So yes, mother love is hugely important in the books” (“Women of Harry Potter”). The Harry Potter series tells of the exciting adventures of a boy wizard pitted against the forces of evil, the first of which he won thanks to his mother’s self-sacrifice, protection, and love.

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