



Evil Women in *Harry Potter*

Breaking Gender Expectations and Representations of Evil

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Abstract

With a focus on gender expectations, this qualitative study analyses how Bellatrix Lestrange and Dolores Umbridge in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series represent evil. Through close reading the first and the final three books of the series using the feminist criticism perspective performativity, the aim of this study is to highlight how the evil women in the series are portrayed in comparison to both good characters of both sexes as well as evil men. The results show that while the evil women represent evil in the ways that they break their gender expectations, the good men also represent goodness in the way that they break their gender expectations. Thus, they are not evil because they deviate from these expectations, but because the gendered traits these women embody are connected to evil and, in turn, help make the reader perceive them as such.

Keywords: Judith Butler, performativity, stereotypes, femininity, masculinity

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Introduction

As a very popular and well-known series, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* has been analysed through feminist criticism multiple times throughout the years. However, while many analyses look at the good women or the main villain in the series, fewer studies focus on the evil women and how they are portrayed. Close reading two of the most evil women, Bellatrix Lestrange and Dolores Umbridge, from a literary feminist perspective, I will examine how they are described to represent evil through actions and characteristics. I will also look at them in comparison to the good women and men, as well as the evil men, in the series. This is necessary in order to determine if there are any differences between the evil women and the good characters, as well as if there are any differences between Lestrange's and Umbridge's representation of evil and the representation of evil in their male counterparts. Since Lestrange and Umbridge are introduced to the series in book five and thus only play a part in the final three novels of the series, I will focus my analysis on these ones: *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* as well as *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. In order to define evil within the series, I will also use *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. As the first book of the series, it introduces the main villain Lord Voldemort and the evil in the wizarding world. Book two, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, will also be used to help describe male characters who are introduced earlier in the series and are compared to the evil women.

Jeanne Hoeker LaHaie's Ph.D. dissertation *Girls, mothers and others: Female representation in the adolescent fantasy of J. K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, and Terry Pratchett* focuses on good mothers in adolescent fantasy and she writes about how the evil or unpleasant women in *Harry Potter* are opposites of this concept. She further goes into how Umbridge's femininity in combination with her added masculine-gendered traits is why she is a troublesome character. I will build upon this study, focusing on these traits and how both Bellatrix Lestrange and Dolores Umbridge break gender expectations. I argue that, while they break their gender expectations, they are not evil because they deviate from them, but because the gendered traits that they embody are connected to evil. This essay takes its starting point in Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* about performative theory. According to this theory, gender is something that one does or performs rather than something that one is (Butler 34). The article "Boys Act and Girls Appear: A Content Analysis of Gender Stereotypes Associated with Characters in Children's Popular Culture" by Murnen et al. will

be used to help specify what gender stereotypes are and the book *Women's Lives: A Psychological Exploration* by Claire Etaugh and Judith Bridges will help define social stereotypes concerning good mothers. My arguments will be further supported by two articles: "A Skewed Reflection: The Nature of Evil" by David Deavel and Catherin Deavel, who try to define evil in *Harry Potter*, and "Happily Ever After: Harry Potter and the Quest for the Domestic" by Xiema Gallardo C. and Jason C. Smith, who focus on how the series "troubles" cultural gender binaries (ch. 7¹).

Gender, Performativity and Stereotypical Traits

Butler argues that gender is something separated from sex. While sex is biological, "gender is culturally constructed" and thus it is not a result of a person's sex or fixed in the way that a sex is (Butler 8). She suggests that gender is cultural meanings that the male or female body undertakes and therefore one cannot say that it follows a sex. Butler further argues that, even if there are stable and binary sexes, the construction of "men" or "women" are not exclusive to the male or female bodies. According to her, gender must not necessarily be binary, even if the sexes appear to be. If one assumes that the gender system is binary, one also upholds a belief where gender is thought to mirror the binary sex system or is restricted by the sexes (Butler 9). Butler suggests that, if one instead imagines gender independent of sex, it becomes a separate thing and descriptions of "man" and "masculine" or "woman" and "feminine" can indicate either a female or a male body (9).

According to Butler, gender is performed as well as bound by regulated habits connected to it. It is thus performative; it establishes the gender identity that it supposedly already *is*. Gender is a doing by someone in the present, meaning that gender identity is not "behind the expressions of gender", but rather it is established through our actions. They are continuously performed, and therefore, these expressions are not results of gender identity but rather create it (Butler 34). Butler suggests that, if we would stop regarding "man" and "woman" as something of higher importance in human beings, in turn, it would also be impossible to subordinate gendered features that conflict with one another. She suggests that these gendered features are "secondary and accidental characteristics" to the study of gender. Thus, she reasons, if a "man" (a construction not necessarily exclusive to the male body (9)) can be described as

¹ This article is included in a Kindle eBook that lacks page numbers.

having masculine attributes, he can also be described to have feminine ones while remaining true to his gender (33).

Gendered traits are the attributes that one is supposed to embody according to the gender one is or is considered to be. Murnen et al. mention two types of gender stereotypes: the prescriptive kind, which concerns what people should do, and the proscriptive kind, which concerns what people should not do (79). Examples of traits prescribed for men are leadership, independence and aggression and these traits are often associated with high status (Rudman, qtd. in Murnen et al. 79). Proscribed traits are instead emotion, weakness and traits associated with low status. For women, prescriptions are traits such as emotional, nurturing and an interest in children, while proscriptions are aggressive, intimidating and dominating (Murnen et al. 79). Individuals who exaggerate their gender roles, to which these traits belong, help uphold current norms and this is called hyper-masculinity or hyper-femininity (Murnen et al. 79). Hyper-masculinity is, for example, connected to violence as it is considered to be manly by these individuals (Zaitchik and Mosher, qtd. in Murnen et al. 79).

Evil in Harry Potter

In their article “A Skewed Reflection: The Nature of Evil”, Deavel and Deavel try to define the concept of evil within *Harry Potter*. They have found that evil is “a lacking in what something is supposed to be. It is a lacking of what is good” (132). They further claim that being evil in the books is not “something definite”, but rather failing “to do, love, or care for the right things” (133). Deavel and Deavel also briefly refer to Quirrell and how he, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, learns about good and evil from Lord Voldemort (137). At the end of the book, as Harry confronts him, Quirrell tells him that: “There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it” (Rowling, *Philosopher’s Stone* 313). This suggests that those who consider themselves as good, are the ones who are too weak to seek power. Further suggesting that power is something evil, is the headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, telling Harry about power being his weakness and that ““perhaps those who are best suited to power are those who have never sought it”” (*Harry Potter and Deathly Hallows* 586). It appears that the quest for power is evil and not power in general.

Transcending Gender Expectations

Lack of Nurture

Contradictory to the good women in the series, Bellatrix Lestrange and Dolores Umbridge lack traditionally feminine characteristics, such as nurture, and instead embody more masculine characteristics. In her analysis of nurturing women in *Harry Potter*, LaHaie discusses how Molly Weasley and Lily Potter, both mothers, have given their lives for their children in different ways: “Lily because she literally gives her life and Molly because her life is consumed by taking care of her family” (63). Molly also enters the final battle of the series, where LaHaie suggests that Molly is able to draw upon more motherly power when her children are being threatened (64-65). This scene, where Molly runs to the battle between Lestrange and, among others, her daughter and starts battling Lestrange herself (*Deathly Hallows* 602), indicates that Molly would also have given her life literally for her child. LaHaie includes non-mothers, such as Minerva McGonagall and Hermione Granger, in her analysis as well, since they still have nurturing traits. Elizabeth Heilman gives the example of how McGonagall “is concerned that the students get enough sleep and stay well” (qtd. in LaHaie 63), which makes LaHaie consider her as a “maternal substitute” (63). LaHaie also mentions how Hermione takes care of her friends, Harry Potter and Ron Weasley, throughout the series and discusses how Hermione, in the epilogue of *Deathly Hallows*, becomes an actual nurturing mother as well (63). Since these are all important women to the hero of the series, Harry Potter himself, and they help him fight the evil that he encounters, they will hereafter be defined as good women.

When it comes to the evil women, they are neither mothers nor nurturing maternal substitutes. While Umbridge tries to maintain the image of being a caring teacher at Hogwarts, it becomes clear that she is in fact not one. Her words often appear to be caring and kind, but her actions do not match her words. At the end of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, she tries to coax a testimony out of a student in front of the Minister for Magic. The student, Marietta, has been hexed for sharing information with Umbridge and therefore refuses to reveal anything else in fear of making things worse for herself. Not only does the endearment “dear” cling false together with her impatience to find out what Marietta knows, she finally also snaps at her quite condescendingly:

“Never mind the spots now, dear,” said Umbridge impatiently, “just take your robes away from your mouth and tell the Minister –”
But Marietta gave another muffled wail and shook her head frantically.

“Oh, very well, you silly girl, *I’ll* tell him,” snapped Umbridge. She hitched her sickly smile back on to her face [...]” (*Order of the Phoenix* 565-566)

Umbridge appears to try and put herself together again by putting a smile back on her face and the fact that it is described to be “sickly” makes it clear that it is not an especially kind one. “Hitching” it back on also gives the feel of it being deceptive and thus masking her, in this case, non-caring nature.

Lestrangle’s lack of nurturing feelings becomes clear in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* when her sister, Narcissa Malfoy, is worried about her son Draco serving Voldemort. Lestrangle does not appear to understand these feelings, as serving Voldemort is an honour to her. Instead of comforting Narcissa, she callously tells her sister that she should be proud and that she herself gladly would give up her own sons “to the service of the Dark Lord!” (*Half-Blood Prince* 30). She cannot understand her sister’s maternal worry over her son. According to LaHaie, it is only the evil or unpleasant women of the series who lack maternal feelings and she states that there is nothing worse in the series than a woman who would not choose her children first. Thus, “her lack of maternity” seems to be important for her evil character (LaHaie 66-67). Furthermore, Lestrangle does not seem to care about family at all. She is described to scream triumphantly when she kills her cousin Sirius Black (*Order of the Phoenix* 742) and is grateful for being given the chance by Voldemort to kill her niece (*Deathly Hallows* 9).

Violence

When considering the gendered traits that Murnen et al. discuss, Lestrangle’s and Umbridge’s embodiment of violence and aggression instead of the opposing care and nurture, shows that they represent masculine traits rather than feminine ones. Returning to the example above, where Umbridge is trying to convince Marietta to testify, it becomes clear that Umbridge is not only non-nurturing but also physically violent. When she still cannot convince Marietta to testify, in her desperation to provide the Minister for Magic with the information that Marietta refuses to share, she seizes the student and starts shaking her hard (*Order of the Phoenix* 569). It shows how she does not care about Marietta when she cannot gain anything from her any longer and thus, it is not true caring at all. However, Umbridge, working within both the Ministry of Magic and Hogwarts, normally cannot act violent in more than words or actions, as she must follow laws and regulations. Instead, she is passively violent in the way she lets the students write their lines of punishment with their own blood, carving the messages into their

own hands. From Harry's first detention with her, it is also clear that she enjoys their pain, as she is described to be watching him with a smile on her face (*Order of the Phoenix* 247).

Lestrangle however, as the right hand of the main villain, does not need to hide her violent nature as she operates outside of society's rules and only answers to the rules of Voldemort. This violent nature can, for example, be seen in the way that she uses unforgivable curses on other characters. With the Cruciatius Curse, she tortures Neville Longbottom's parents until insanity and appears to be almost pleased about it; as she meets Neville, "a truly evil smile" is described to light up her face before she tells him that she has "had the pleasure of meeting [his] parents" (*Order of the Phoenix* 736). Mentioning this, something that Neville already knows very well since she was convicted to the wizarding prison Azkaban for this very crime, appears to be another way to torment him. "Alive with excitement", she then comes up with the idea of torturing him as well, to see "how long Longbottom lasts before he cracks like his parents" (736-737). As Harry later fails to use the Cruciatius Curse on her, she further supports her enjoyment for inflicting pain on others in words as well, when she tells him that: "You need to really want to cause pain – to enjoy it –" in order for these curses to work (*Order of the Phoenix* 746). Gallardo and Smith also explain that the name Bellatrix, which means "female warrior" in Latin, "indicates the presence of phallic aggression in the female body" (ch. 7). This further signals how Lestrangle embodies the masculine traits of violence and aggression.

In contrast to Lestrangle and Umbridge, the good women of the series lack the trait of violence. While they do fight, they mainly do so in self-defence or in defence of others. In fact, it can be argued that all of the battles at the end of the *Harry Potter* books are defensive ones; from Voldemort's (along with Quirrell's) infiltration in the first book, to Harry and his friends being attacked in the Ministry of Magic in the fifth book, and finally to the battle at Hogwarts in the last instalment of the series, where the good characters come together to defend the school from evil. In this final battle, Molly Weasley is an example of a good woman who has never been seen fighting before in the series. Here, in defence of her daughter who is under attack, she, in turn, attacks Lestrangle (*Deathly Hallows* 602). Based on the information that the reader has been given, McGonagall is another good woman who has merely been aggressive in defence of Hogwarts and its inhabitants. An example of this is when she declares that Dumbledore will not fight alone when the Minister for Magic is trying to bring him in on the assumption that he created the student group Dumbledore's Army (*Order of the Phoenix* 573). While it is expressed as an attack against these characters, it is a defensive reaction, as she is trying to help save

someone close to her. Hermione also shares this non-violent trait. It was, in fact, Hermione who founded Dumbledore's Army, which consisted of students who were unhappy with how Umbridge would not let them practice defensive spells in the Defence Against the Dark Arts class, and her non-violent nature is reflected in the purpose of this group. Instead of founding a group with a focus on attacking Death Eaters (a group of dark wizards working for Voldemort) or Umbridge and those assisting her inside of Hogwarts, its focus is merely on learning to defend themselves against the evil characters (*Order of the Phoenix* 314-315). Hermione also defends the usage of jinxes to Umbridge, arguing that "they can be very useful when they're used defensively" (*Order of the Phoenix* 294). To her, a jinx is not always negative. Specifying that they are useful when used defensively, suggests that she agrees that they are not to be used on others unless one needs to defend oneself. Using a harmful spell when in need thus becomes justified, since it is not used with the intent of harming another person, but in order to protect oneself.

Desire for Power

Lestrangle and Umbridge are not only already in a position of power, but greedy for more power – another typically masculine characteristic which the good women of the series seem to lack. In their analysis of Umbridge, Gallardo and Smith describe her as exerting "power untempered with the nurturing previously associated with Rowling's maternal females and paternal males" that they have found in the first four books of the series (ch. 7). Umbridge's power comes from her close work relationship with the Minister for Magic and through him, she becomes powerful enough to make decisions about staff and regulations at the school. This can, for example, be seen in the many Educational Decrees she continues to pass throughout *Order of the Phoenix* – all of them new regulations that suit her needs and they are not only, as LaHaie claims, "designed to ensure her total control over the students at Hogwarts" (71), but also her control over the teachers. Similarly, Lestrangle works very closely to Voldemort and thus also has power over others working for him. She dominates other Death Eaters as well as her sister and brother-in-law, Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy, in their own house.

This more masculine feature, can be found in one of the good female characters as well. Similar to the power positions of Lestrangle and Umbridge, McGonagall has a power position within the school environment where she is the Deputy Headmistress and works closely with the headmaster Albus Dumbledore. The difference is that both Lestrangle and Umbridge appear

to want *more* power while McGonagall seem content where she is. For Umbridge, this quest for power can be seen in the way that she implements more regulations the more she is defied. This is done, both to make sure that she is the one running the school and, it appears, to make sure that others know that she is more powerful than them. After McGonagall has managed to override Umbridge's authority by going to Dumbledore, Umbridge contacts the Minister for Magic and, through him, receives authorization to form a new regulation. This gives Umbridge, rather than their teachers, the power to strip students of their privileges. When she mentions this to McGonagall, she states that she could not have anyone overriding her: "Well, now, I couldn't have that. I contacted the Minister at once, and he quite agreed with me that the High Inquisitor has to have the power to strip pupils of privileges, or she – that is to say, I – would have less authority than common teachers!" (*Order of the Phoenix* 385). Since Umbridge cannot handle having less power than "common teachers", she finds a solution for this imbalance of power through her powerful connections. However, after she has reinstated her power over the teachers at Hogwarts, she also takes pleasure in stripping them of their power. During this conversation with McGonagall, Umbridge is described to be "simpling" as she explains the newly implemented regulations. This term indicates that she is quite satisfied to be in a higher position of power than the teachers at Hogwarts and enjoys letting them know that she is.

Again, Lestrage has a similar behaviour. However, since she is on the outside of society's regulations, she is in no need of expanding said regulations to gain more power. Instead, she wants to please her own so-called ruler, Voldemort, at all costs. In *Deathly Hallows*, when a couple of bounty hunters bring Harry and his friends to the Malfoy Manor, she will not give Lucius or the bounty hunters credit for finding him. With Lucius, she sneeringly undermines his authority in his own house, claiming that he no longer has any. To the bounty hunters, she makes it clear that she does not care for gold and that they can have it. She only seeks Voldemort's "honour" which, to her, rates higher than their desires for gold (374-375). While she might appear love-struck at times, and it can be argued that love is her reason for trying to impress him, the infatuation could also be because of his power; a love of power rather than the man himself. Like Umbridge, she has the need to please her superordinate at all costs and is almost hysterical when this cannot happen. In difference to Lestrage however, Umbridge shows no indications of being infatuated with the Minister for Magic. In fact, in the final instalment of the series, when the minister has been replaced and the ministry is under the control of Voldemort, she is still quite content to work there since she can still wield her power

over others – now even more as she pleases. In the novel, Harry notices how her Patronus (a magically conjured protector against evil creatures that is stronger and brighter the happier emotions the caster can muster) is extremely bright because of her happiness of being in the Voldemort-ruled ministry, “upholding the twisted laws she had helped to write” (*Deathly Hallows* 210). Assuming that they are both greedy for power, they are both trying to receive this power through their male superiors. They do whatever they can to gain the men’s approval, since it leads to more power to exercise and neither Lestrage nor Umbridge are above using violence or deceit to gain this approval. Thus, their power is one that leaves victims in its wake, while the similar power of McGonagall is used to nurture those she has power over.

Interestingly enough, there are in fact no women in the most powerful positions. Instead, good as evil, they work closely with a man and receive their power through their connection to this man in different ways. Even though Lestrage and Umbridge are performing evil acts, they never cross the boundaries when it comes to the male power above them. Perhaps this has to do with how high status is connected to prescribed traits for men but lower status for women. While the characters are able to transcend their gender boundaries in some ways, it appears that there are still some limits as to what the biological women in the series can do. In this case, while they can have very powerful positions, they cannot have the highest power position and completely rule over men within their power context.

In Comparison to the Men of the Series

While these traits that Lestrage and Umbridge embody are typically masculine, they are not shared with all of the men in the series. In fact, they are only shared with the evil men. Instead, the good men also transcend their gender expectations and embody the opposite, typically feminine, traits of the good women in the series. Similar to Lestrage and Umbridge, the evil men are not above using violence to reach their goals and forbidden curses are, for example, frequently used by the dark wizards in the novels. In contrast, Harry Potter himself, rarely uses harmful spells and when he does, it is done in defence of himself or others. Even in the final battle against Voldemort, he uses a disarming spell against the latter’s killing curse, opting out of the chance to directly try to kill Voldemort himself (*Deathly Hallows* 608). The Cruciatius Curse, the previously mentioned torture spell that is also forbidden to cast, is one of the few harmful curses that Harry casts on other characters. The first time that he uses it is on Lestrage after she has killed his godfather and it fails, since he neither means to hurt her severely enough nor enjoys it (*Order of the Phoenix* 746). As he later uses it on another Death Eater in defence

of McGonagall, Harry expresses that he understands what Lestrage meant and that one, in fact, does ““need to really mean it”” (*Deathly Hallows* 483). He has developed into someone who, in fact, does want to hurt those who hurt the characters he cares about. However, he never mentions having enjoyed using this curse, which contrasts with what Lestrage has previously told him. Thus, there appears to be certain differences between when good and evil characters use these harmful spells. Comparing the good characters to the evil ones, this difference appears to depend upon if the violence is committed in defence or as a first attack, as well as if the violence is enjoyed. If it is done in order to protect and not purely with the intent of harming another being, it is presented as justified, since the reader is never led to question the goodness of these characters. Instead, it becomes an acceptable way of fighting the violence used against them.

A desire for power, while it can be found in the evil men of the series, is once again lacking in the good men. Besides Voldemort, who, as the main villain has the desire to rule the entire wizarding world, the less powerful dark wizards are also drawn to power. However, they are not always looking to wield it themselves, but rather, like Lestrage and Umbridge, appear to be drawn to the power of those who are more powerful. Lucius Malfoy, Draco’s father, is one example of a male character who is drawn to Voldemort’s power. While he was a known Death Eater from the time that Voldemort first ruled, after Voldemort disappeared and was presumed dead when his killing curse on Harry backfired, ““Lucius Malfoy came back saying he’d never meant any of it”” (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* 30). In *Order of the Phoenix*, Mr Weasley later expresses that Malfoy has been donating generously to the Ministry of Magic and thus has come to know ““the right people”” (143). Mr Weasley describes him as well-connected enough to be able to ask favours in order to, for example, ““delay laws he doesn’t want passed”” (143). It is thus clear that Malfoy is looking for power wherever he can find it; when Voldemort is no longer the most powerful wizard he can follow, Malfoy instead turns to the Minister for Magic and the other wizards in power positions at the ministry. Through them, he can still bend the laws in his own favour.

As one of the most powerful wizards on the good side of the series, Dumbledore himself has also battled with a desire for power, but he no longer shares this trait. As previously mentioned, he tells Harry about power being his weakness when he was younger (*Deathly Hallows* 586) and this is a story that becomes public knowledge when a biography of him is released after his death. When younger, Dumbledore was friends with the famous dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald and he shared the latter’s ideas for power (291). However, after the death

of his sister, Dumbledore and Grindelwald parts ways (292) and the former appears to have lost his hunger for power; later he becomes famous for defeating Grindelwald (15), proving that he no longer shares the same interests when it comes to power. In the final novel, after Harry sacrifices himself in order to end Voldemort's reign, he meets the dead Dumbledore once more and it is at this point that Dumbledore tells him that "perhaps those who are best suited to power are those who have never sought it" (*Deathly Hallows* 586). Considering his background, it appears as if he has realized how craving power can lead to hurting people, while those thrust into power who do not specifically care for it (like Harry himself) use it to help others. Harry, the only one who can defeat Voldemort, is given this power through a prophecy and a killing curse that backfired, marking him as Voldemort's equal (*Order of the Phoenix* 774-775). This is a power that he also uses to help others. At the end of *Deathly Hallows*, Harry and his friends meet Dumbledore's brother Aberforth, who questions Dumbledore's care for Harry and asks why he never told Harry to stay safe and hidden if he did indeed care for him. Harry defends Dumbledore by saying that "sometimes you've got to think about more than your own safety! Sometimes you've got to think about the greater good!" (463). Harry does in fact think about everyone else's safety and it is the reason why he sacrifices his own life at the end of the novel. He tells Voldemort that he "was ready to die to stop [him] hurting these people –" (604) and connects it to how his mother died for him. Lily Potter's death is the reason why Harry survived the killing curse as a child. She died to save his life and that love, in turn, protected him from Voldemort (*Philosopher's Stone* 321-322). In doing the same thing as she did, in being willing to sacrifice his own life in order to save others, Harry has provided protection for these characters as well. Thus, he, like McGonagall, uses his position of power in a nurturing way rather than a selfish or harmful one. In fact, one could argue that Harry's entire power stems from nurture and love, considering how it was born from his mother's sacrifice for him as a child. Harry also gives up the Elder Wand, which is the most powerful wand created by Death himself, and the power that it brings with it. He reasons that while it is powerful, he was happier with his own wand and it is therefore the only one that he requires (*Deathly Hallows* 612). He rates the happiness he experienced with his own wand higher than the power that the new one can provide him with. Rather than bringing him happiness, he believes that the Elder Wand would bring trouble (613), hinting on a belief that power does not bring good things with it.

As for nurture, Voldemort, who is somewhat of an embodiment of evil in *Harry Potter* as the main villain of the series, lacks this trait completely. He is not above killing others – not even children, as can be seen when it comes to his attempted murder on Harry as a baby. In

fact, Voldemort even rejects his own mother. Gallardo and Smith claim that this is connected to his fear of death; he cannot believe that his mother has died if she had magic and magic, to Voldemort, is equal to power. They suggest that this is the reason why he rejects his mother after learning about her weak and vulnerable end and why he instead strives to be the opposite of the “feminine principles she seems to represent” (Gallardo and Smith, ch. 7). This connection between his mother and weakness, could be a reason for his complete lack of nurture, as nurture is a trait typically connected to good mothers. Lucius Malfoy, who is in fact a father himself, cannot quite be defined as nurturing either. While he might care for his own son, he is not above helping the Dark Lord in his attempts at killing Harry as a child. At one point in *Order of the Phoenix*, Malfoy also suggests that he is going to kill Neville when the latter makes an attempt to defend himself and his friends against the Death Eaters. Malfoy is described to sneer at Neville before telling him that his ““grandmother is used to losing family members”” to the dark side’s cause, hinting at Neville’s parents having been tortured to insanity by other Death Eaters. He continues with stating that Neville’s death, therefore, would not be of a shock to her (736). Murder in general, and especially murder of children, goes against the nurturing trait and, as can be seen, being a parent does not automatically mean that one is nurturing.

Dumbledore is an example of a good man who embodies the nurturing trait. As the headmaster of Hogwarts, he not only cares for all students at the school, but he has also become a sort of father figure for Harry. It is merely touched upon in the series, but even Dumbledore himself remarks upon how their relationship is more than headmaster and student. In *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry experiences glimpses into Voldemort’s mind through a connection that they share as a consequence of the backfiring killing curse that Voldemort casted on Harry as a baby (761). Dumbledore admits to having avoided Harry in order to keep Voldemort from ever finding out about their relationship if he, in turn, tried to enter Harry’s mind as well (762). Their closer relationship is also noticeable to surrounding characters, which can be seen in *Half-Blood Prince* as the new Minister for Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, remarks on this bond between them (539). In the same novel, after Dumbledore’s death, Harry also groups Dumbledore with his dead parents and godfather and thinks about how they had all been “determined to protect him” (536). Dumbledore has been a nurturing character for Harry from the beginning of the series, trying to prepare and guide him through his destiny of conquering Voldemort. The fathers Arthur Weasley and Remus Lupin embody nurturing traits as well, not only in the way that they help Harry as paternal figures throughout the series, but also when it comes to their families. While the situation requires precaution in the middle of dangers in *Deathly Hallows*, Mr

Weasley refuses to prove who he is until he can see his injured son. Harry is described as never having “heard Mr Weasley shout like that before” (58), which makes it clear how worried he is for his son in that moment and how he no longer cares about security first. Lupin is another parent in the series who dies for his child; while Lupin does not die to protect his son from immediate danger, he does die for him indirectly. At the end of *Deathly Hallows*, Lupin is resurrected to help Harry in his sacrifice to Voldemort. As they talk, Lupin tells Harry that he hopes that his son will understand why he died, since he was trying to create a better world for his son to live in (571).

Gendered Traits in Connection to Evil

As previously mentioned, Deavel and Deavel define evil in *Harry Potter* as a lacking of what is good (132). If the feminine traits of good men and women in the series have been defined as caring, nurturing and content with their existing power, being evil is the lack of these. What might be interesting to note, is that these traits can also be connected to the stereotypical traits of a good mother. In their book about women, Etaugh and Bridges discuss social stereotypes of mothers. A good mother is expected to be both nurturing and self-sacrificing in that she always puts her child first (Etaugh and Bridges, 188). We have not only previously seen evidence of these self-sacrificing and nurturing good women, but the good men also share these traits. Perhaps then, these maternal (or, in this case, parental) traits, are the real root of goodness within the series. Being nurturing, caring and self-sacrificing, in itself, cancels out traits such as violence and a hunger for power. While a character does not necessarily have to be a parent, such as McGonagall and Dumbledore, all of the good characters still embody these parental traits. It appears then, that the traits have become redefined as traits of a good parent. Therefore, if evil is a lack of good, the masculine and non-parental traits, which are opposites of the feminine and parental ones, appear to be what can be defined as evil within this world. Evil traits are consequently those of violence, a hunger for power and a lack of nurture – traits that are also, in fact, embodied by both the evil men and women in the series. Thus, it is through these traits that Lestrangle and Umbridge do the wrong things and fail at caring for the right ones.

When looking at these two evil women in comparison to the good men and women of the series, it becomes clear that these stereotypical traits are not necessarily connected to gender. If one considers these traits to be cultural prescriptions and proscriptions, it is merely something that we as a society connect with being male or female. The analysed traits appear to represent

good or bad rather than male or female: the feminine (positive) traits found in women and men complement good characters and the masculine (negative) traits found in evil women and men complement evil ones. It is thus not the transcendence of gender expectations that makes us perceive these women as evil. This can be connected to what Butler writes about it being impossible to subordinate features according to gender if we stop conforming to “man” and “woman” (33). It appears as if this is true for these specific traits in *Harry Potter*, as it does not matter whether they are embodied by men or women when they are subordinated to the binary of good and evil. Butler’s argument that it is possible for a “man” to be described as having both masculine and feminine attributes while remaining true to his gender identity (33) can also be seen in the series. Both Lestrage and Umbridge are women, described with both feminine and masculine attributes, and their gender identities as females are never questioned.

Conflicting Gender Representation

As a result of characterizing both feminine and masculine characteristics, Umbridge almost appear more evil than Lestrage. As previously mentioned, Umbridge often does not match her words with her actions, and Gallardo and Smith claim that this is one of the reasons for her being one of the nastiest antagonists in the series; her “excessiveness in both femininity and wickedness compel her beyond the very gender stereotypes she embodies” (ch. 7). As previously seen, this “wickedness” match certain typical masculine attributes but her mannerisms are very feminine. She speaks “in a fluttery, girlish, high-pitched voice”, wears a “velvet bow” on her head (*Order of the Phoenix* 134-135) and wears a fluffy pink cardigan (196). Her office at Hogwarts is also full of lace and plates with kittens painted on them (245). LaHaie refers to Butler’s theory of performativity and connects this to Umbridge, arguing that she is unpleasant in the way that her acts that are coded male (specifically the same ones that have been a focus in this essay: a lack of nurture, violence and a hunger for power) are combined with her acts that are coded female (70). Umbridge is thus problematic because these actions that are coded male conflict “with her hyper-feminized performance of gender” and LaHaie suggests that Umbridge’s mixture of typically feminine and masculine attributes, ones that conflict with one another, is what makes readers uncomfortable. She is not following the cultural gender norms in the expected way (LaHaie 72).

Butler discusses identity and writes that, if gender attributes and acts are, in fact, performative and a way for the body to produce its own cultural meaning, there are no existing gender identities to which one can compare these attributes and acts. Thus, she claims, “there

would be no true or false [...] acts of gender” and the idea of “a true gender identity” would be exposed for the governing fiction it is (Butler 192). Butler argues that, as gender is created through socially upheld performances, the idea of a fixed masculinity or femininity are merely limiting the possibilities of performativity and genders existing outside of these restrictions (192-193). Butler also suggests that gendered features that conflict with one another are only possible because of their subordination to “man” and “woman” (Butler 33). This discussion would suggest that there is no one true gender identity to be moulded after; the existing masculine and feminine binary is rather a cultural restriction on gender. When it comes to Umbridge and readers’ dislike of her, cultural norms and expectations of society appear to be in play. If Umbridge would not embody feminine and masculine traits that had such conflicting cultural meanings, her feminine mannerisms would not be considered so awful of her to embody along with her masculine acts. She would merely be an unattractive woman embodying both feminine and masculine traits while performing evil acts. When discussing Umbridge as a character which makes reader’s uncomfortable, LaHaie claims that the readers are led “to assume that her femininity is the part of her that is consciously performed” (72) and this appears to be what makes her be perceived as such a vile character. Umbridge seems to use the (good) feminine traits, such as nurture and endearments also found in the good women of the series, in order to mask her (evil) masculine ones. Thus, it is because she adapts the good that is connected to these feminine traits onto a persona that mainly embodies the evil that is connected to the masculine traits, that the traits appear to clash so badly.

In contrast to Umbridge, Lestrage does not have this conflict of gendered traits. She has lost her beauty, and possibly other feminine attributes she once had, while in Azkaban, leaving her with “straggly” and “unkempt” hair (*Order of the Phoenix* 502) as well as a hollowed-out face that is described as “gaunt and skull-like” (721). As mentioned previously, Gallardo and Smith suggest that the meaning of her name “indicates the presence of phallic aggression in the female body” and they connect this to Lady Macbeth. They find similarities between how the latter asks to be “unsexed” and filled with “presumably masculine” cruelty so that she, without regret, can assist her husband in committing murder and Lestrage’s devotion to Voldemort’s reign (Gallardo and Smith, ch. 7). This would further support the claim that Lestrage embodies more male characteristics than she does feminine ones. However, in this case, “unsexed” would not mean that her gender identity consists of freely mixed gendered traits, but rather that she has abandoned her typically (good) feminine ones in order to embody the more (evil) masculine ones.

Conclusion

Lestrange and Umbridge do not embody the feminine and parental traits of nurture and self-sacrifice that the other good men and women in the series do. Instead they embody opposite masculine and non-parental traits such as violence and aggression, just as the evil men in the series. They are also greedy for power, which is a masculine attribute found in other male villains as well. These feminine and parental traits can be defined as being good in the series, while the masculine and non-parental ones can be defined as being evil. It therefore does not matter whether it is a male or female character that embodies them, since the traits are not subordinated according to gender. Thus, while Lestrange and Umbridge represent evil in the ways that they break their gender expectations, the good men also represent goodness in the way that they break theirs. They are therefore not evil because they deviate from these expectations; it is rather the gendered traits that these women embody that are connected to evil and consequently help the reader to perceive them as such. While Umbridge, specifically, might have some very conflicting gendered traits, it is not necessarily that her feminine mannerisms that clash with her male ones are connected to gender. Rather, the conflict appears to occur because of how the feminine traits, and their connection to good, are being used to mask the masculine ones that are instead connected to evil. This further supports the claim that the traits are not subordinated to gender in the series, but to the binaries of good and evil.

Bellatrix Lestrange and Dolores Umbridge choose to embody masculine-gendered traits that are defined as evil within the series and thus, it is their deviation from the traits of the good characters of the series that marks them as evil. In their analysis of evil in *Harry Potter*, Deavel and Deavel state that: “We are evil only if we choose evil” (144). It is, indeed, Lestrange’s and Umbridge’s choices that illustrate their evil nature; their decision to continuously perform a masculinity that is coded evil.

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