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Golly Easterly Instructor Smith Honors English 10-3 16 March 2012 An Investigation of J. K. Rowling's Utilization of Animal and Color Symbolism in Her Harry Potter Series Many consider symbolism the most important factor in comprehending the knowledgeable realm. " Symbols and metaphors extend into the realm of everyday language and figures of speech" (Biedermann VII). In turn, the Harry Potter novels of J. K. Rowling are extensively " philosophical" and symbolic (Bagget and Klein 3). Some believe that a civilization that is very advanced will keep records of important symbols (Biedermann VIII). Paralleling this statement, the civilization that J. K. Rowling creates is one " of menacing trolls and forbidden forests [that] haunts the bestseller lists week in and out, enthralling readers and leaving them hungry for more" (Bagget and Klein 1). Thus the question arises: In what ways and to what extent does J. K. Rowling incorporate animal and color symbolism into her Harry Potter series? Non-fiction animals that exist in reality, as well as in these novels, are utilized as symbols by J. K. Rowling. Owls often seem to be intelligent, tolerant, contemplative, ominous, and nocturnal. (249). These animals appear " frequently in the emblems of scholarly publishing houses and book stores" (250). According to Aeppli, cats are considered " the typically feminine animal[...] and females are known as being ' more deeply rooted in the dark intuitive side of life than man with his simpler psyche'" (59-60). " The cat is tireless and cunning when going after its prey — the virtues' of a good soldier" like Professor McGonagall (60). Of course, Rowling includes many super-natural figures. According to Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, "[p]hoenixes burst into flame when it is time for them to die and are reborn

from the ashes” (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets 207). Dumbledore refers to the usual grandeur of the phoenix and his feathers of scarlet and gold, the colors of Gryffindor (Rowling, Chamber 207). The phoenix, often referred to as the “ firebird[,]” ignites itself centennially, perishes, and is reborn from the cinders. The phoenix globally embodies “ immortality, death by fire, the sun, and resurrection” (Bruce-Mitford 31). In Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, Rowling describes “ a dog that filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads, three pairs of rolling mad eyes, [and] three noses, twitching and quivering in their direction” (Rowling, Stone 160). According to Hermione, the dog is blatantly protecting something, for it stands on a disguised door (Rowling, Stone 162). The three-headed dog mainly symbolizes reliability and awareness in mythology; it usually portrays a protector at the entrance to the world of the dead (97). Unicorns have come to signify wholesomeness and power (Biedermann 360). “ According to medieval lore, a unicorn’s horn was a powerful antidote to poison” (28). Unicorns are described as “ pure and incorruptible” (Bruce-Mitford 28). Rubeus Hagrid explains that unicorn blood has the ability to save any life — no matter how near to death — but at an awful cost, having killed an animal of its purity and lack of defense in a selfish manner (Rowling, Stone 258). Mythology, when describing the conception of the earth, depicts dragons as very primitive. The gods are called to overcome these dragons and eventually, their most important descendants become “ dragon-slayers” (102). “ In fairy tales and legends, slaying the dragon is a frequent test of the hero’s mettle” (Biedermann 102). As the dragons are being tended to in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, “

torrents of fire [shoot] into the dark sky from their open, fanged, mouths, fifty feet above the ground on their outstretched necks" (Rowling, Goblet 326). In a Christian view, the dragon can represent the evil counterpart, usually a devil (Biedermann 103). Many main characters in this series are represented by the animals into which they can transform. Because of the rat's reputation for soiling what is good and carrying sickness, it has become known as a follower of the "devil, demons, and witches" (279). Peter Pettigrew, a follower of Harry's evil counterpart, spends many years disguised as a rat. Black dogs have been thought to be in partnership with doers of black magic, yet "only rarely do dogs appear in a negative light" (97). The Chinese mostly considered them guards against fiends (98). Dogs primarily have a reputation of "loyalty and vigilance" (97). These are qualities similar to those of Harry's god-father Sirius Black. To Christians, a wolf is most often the rival endangering those who hold strong faith. Various fables of wolves resulting from murderous individuals exist. The word werewolf is exactly translated to "man-wolf" (387). As the Latin word for wolf is "lupus[,]" it is a great foreshadowing tool that the Hogwarts professor with the surname "Lupin" is in fact a werewolf (387). The first name of said professor, Remus, also seems too well suited to be of coincidence. It appears in "the Roman legend of the Capitoline wolf that was said to have nursed Romulus and Remus" (Biedermann 389). The deer has great significance in this series. Various older legends of Europe include adolescent females who are changed into does. It was a doe that "was said to have rescued fleeing Frankish warriors by showing a point at which they could ford the Main River" (Biedermann 97). In Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Rowling describes

" a silver-white doe, moon-bright and dazzling, picking her way over the ground" and Harry senses the " inexplicable familiarity" of this creature. His mother's patronus, a symbol used to fight off evil creatures with a spell, was a doe identical to this one. Harry realizes that his patronus is inherited from his father when he casts his own spell and sees a stag with prominent antlers. This causes him to recall his father's nickname, Prongs. (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban 411) As the mascot of Slytherin House is a snake, it is reasonable that—as reported by an Christian passage, Physiologus—" the deer spits water into every crevice in which poisonous snakes are hiding; it thus spits them out and tramples them" (92). The deer has been seen as having skin that can act as a talisman to defeat snake poison, and antlers that can be powdered for protection against dark powers (92). Supposedly, " burnt deer horn drives away any snake" (Biedermann 93). The sorting hat, the judge of how each student is placed into a house, sings "[one] might belong in Hufflepuff, [w]here they are just and loyal, [t]hose patient Hufflepuffs are true [a]nd unafraid of toil" (Rowling, Stone 118). As Hufflepuff is somewhat of a misunderstood house, it is understandable that " yellow [the primary house color] gives some of the most mixed messages of all. It is the color of pulsating life—of corn and gold and angelic haloes—and it is also at the same time a color of bile, and in its sulphurous incarnation it is the color of the Devil" (Finlay 203). European opinion has dubbed the color cowardly, which coincides with the notion that Hufflepuff is quite inferior to the brave Gryffindor (Bruce-Mitford 107). Rubeus Hagrid states that "“ Everyone says Hufflepuff are a lot o’ duffers" (Rowling, Stone 80) According to Goethe and his color theory, yellow is ““

soft and merry'" but can easily become unpleasant (392). A badger-the Hufflepuff mascot-survives off the fat of its own body, which has turned it into a representation of iniquity corresponding to the bad representation of the Hufflepuff house. In the English language, the term " badgering" is synonymous to irritating (Biedermann 28). The unnerved new students are told that they could prosper "' in wise old Ravenclaw, [i]f [they've] a ready mind, where those of wit and learning will always find their kind'" (Rowling, Stone 118). The House color blue is primarily known as a representation of " things of the spirit and the intellect" (Biedermann 44). In order to enter Ravenclaw's chambers, one is asked to solve a problem. This encourages them to always seek knowledge, according to a Ravenclaw member (Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows 587). Usually, eagles-the house mascot-have favorable connotations. They consist of " energy, renewal, contemplation, acuity of vision, [and] royal bearing" (Biedermann 108). Appropriately, the sorting hat also sings "[f]or Ravenclaw, the cleverest [will] always be the best" (Rowling, Goblet 177). The wise sorting hat advises new students that "' perhaps in Slytherin [they'll] make [their] real friends, [t]hose cunning folk use any means to achieve their ends'" (118). To Harry's perception, the Slytherin members appear to be " an unpleasant lot" (Rowling, Stone 119). A serpent, the representative of Slytherin, originated from the ability of the house's founder to speak to snakes, a trait that Harry shares (Rowling, Chamber 196). By the Chinese, snakes are considered hazardously cunning. They also believed that the possession of a snake skin signified that a person would become wealthy (312). A snake is capable of murder by biting and utilizing its poison (Biedermann 310). Snakes are often

related to demise and disarray (Willis 250). Controlled by the returned Lord Voldemort, a basilisk is hidden deep inside Hogwarts Castle that "kills people by looking at them" (Rowling, Chamber 291). In the early Middle Ages, the basilisk was attributed with incredible deadly magic. It also, possessed a lethal "glance and touch" (Rowland 28). According to Moaning Myrtle, a ghost victim of the basilisk, it only takes the glance of a basilisk's "big, yellow eyes" to inflict death (Rowling, Chamber 299). In accordance to the beliefs of Christians, basilisks symbolize an evil spirit that can only be stopped by the bible (Rowland 28). Green, Slytherin's primary color, can represent childishness. "Especially in English, the color is associated with negative emotions" such as "envy" and "jealousy" (Biedermann 159). At one point in time, there was a green color that was undisclosed in China except to the selected royal people. All that was disclosed was its origin of the color green (Finlay 245). This statement parallels the wish of Salazar Slytherin, the founder of the house, to be more particular when admitting students to the school (Rowling, Chamber, 150). The sorting hat declares that one "might belong in Gryffindor, [w]here dwell the brave at heart[.] Their daring nerve and chivalry set Gryffindors apart" (Rowling, Stone 118). Primarily, red-Gryffindor's main color-is a sign of "aggression, vitality and strength, associated with fire and symbolizing both love and mortal combat" (28). Red is commonly the most favored color to an individual (281). To Christians, red is synonymous to Christ's sacrificed blood, those willing to die for Christ, and ardent affection (Biedermann 282). Upon the instruction of Dumbledore, Harry rotates the sword that previously helped him defeat Lord Voldemort, "the rubies blazing in the firelight[...]" [T]hen he [sees] the name

just below the hilt[,] Godric Gryffindor" (Rowling, Chamber 333). According to Aeppli, in a dream, red indicates that the dreamer is brave, or equipped to act. Cardinals wear red in order to indicate that they are ready to give up their lives for Christ (Biedermann 282). Accordingly, Harry willingly accepts that "all that [is] left [for him] [is] the thing itself: dying" to defeat Lord Voldemort (Rowling, Hallows 692). According to [I Peter 5: 8]-for Alchemists- lions can represent sulfur, the chief element or "' the red lion,' for the finished ' philosopher's stone'" (Biedermann 210). The philosopher's stone, as it was originally referred to, is " blood-red" (292). According to Hermione Granger, "' Nicholas Flamel[,]'" an alchemist, "' is the only known maker of the [Philosopher's] Stone'" (Rowling, Stone 219). " In European Heraldry the lion[...] is usually red or gold, with its tongue and claws in a contrasting color" (Biedermann 210). After Gryffindor's defeat of Slytherin for the house cup, "[i]n an instant, the green hangings became gold [the secondary color of Gryffindor house]; the huge Slytherin serpent vanished and a towering Gryffindor lion took its place" (Rowling, Stone 306). Indeed, symbols are amidst the assets of the world that are the most essential (Biedermann IX). Mostly, the human race doesn't register the significance of these signs or even their existence (Bruce-Mitford 6). Yet, as J. K. Rowling utilizes them in her Harry Potter series, "[s]ymbols [...] enable people to bring the incomprehensible into the realm of the tangible, where they can deal with it" (Biedermann XII). Words: 1746 Works Cited Baggett, David, and Shawn Klein. Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts. Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 2004. Print. Biedermann, Hans. Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meanings Behind Them. Trans. James Hulbert. New York:

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