The Role of Magical Animals in Rowling’s Novel

J.K Rowling’s Harry Potter series was an instant hit in modern culture, as she explores boundaries between the human and non-human quite masterfully. From owls that deliver messages to a half-giant half-human, Rowling creates magical creatures that blur the lines between humans and animals. The shared relationship between humans and nature is the most apparent of Rowling’s themes. Throughout the series, the characters in the series have been hindered and helped by animals in equal measure. Humans have always had connections and relationships with animals throughout history, but these are often mundane, uninteresting and quite typical, unlike those in Rowling’s novels. As Morris notes, the animals in Rowling’s books possess sentience that gives creatures moral status, regardless of whether they are “animals” (346). In the magical world of Harry Potter, animals have a greater role, significance, and connection with people. As Morris emphasizes on page 346, the presence of magical ability bears no relevance to the moral worth of these animals. In J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, the magical nature of animals speaks of Rowling’s world where animals communicate with humans in unusually magical ways.

One magical creature that stood out in the story, which helps to bring awareness to the magical qualities that Harry possesses, is the snake. The boa constrictor in the zoo which Harry’s family has visited understands Harry and speaks to him. When Harry sees the boa constrictor and sees the sign which says, “This specimen was bred in the zoo,” Harry asks the snake whether it has ever been to Brazil and mysteriously “the snake shook its head” (Rowling 28). The snake then suddenly slithers out towards the floor away from its cage in which Harry also hears the snake tell him in a low hissing voice, “Brazil, here I come...Thanksss, amigo” (Rowling 28).

Only a creature with magical, mythical qualities can communicate with a human being like such. Moreover, this talking boa constrictor helps Harry become aware of his own magical qualities, such as being able to communicate with a snake. The boa constrictor represents animals that can communicate their sentiments with humans in a world of fantasy in the same way that the Biblical Adam used to communicate with the snake.

Rowling’s portrayal of the boa constrictor in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone is from a “human viewpoint” (Fettke 20). According to Fettke, this style is similar to the “comical inexactitude” common in literature from the Middle Ages and Medieval eras, where moral significance was assigned to non-human species. Harry also has “snake-like” abilities, as evidenced by his ability as a Parseltongue, a wizard with the ability to converse with serpents (Fettke 20). With this incidence, Rowling establishes that although humans and wizards alike have long considered snakes as nothing more than animals, they are capable of rational thought (Fettke 20). This could not be more apparent in the conversation between Harry and the boa constrictor, where he thanks Harry for his help upon being released from its prison, stating “Brazil, here I come...Thanksss, amigo” (Rowling 28).

The magical creatures also serve as messengers in this novel. The owls in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone demonstrate magical intelligence and wisdom. These owls, including Harry’s owl Hedwig, are good at identifying their owners as well as taking their packages to them and such things. For example, before the meal of the day, “about a hundred owls had suddenly

streamed into the Great Hall during breakfast" dropping letters and packages for their owners straight into their laps (Rowling 135). At one point, six owls carry a long package and "dropped it right in front of [Harry] knocking his bacon to the floor" (Rowling 164). Hedwig also delivers important secret messages to whom it is told to deliver messages to (Rowling 237). These owls possess a supernatural ability, in which they can magically and accurately locate their owner's location. Indeed, this is an example of high magical intelligence because this is unusual for any ordinary animal or owl.

There also happens to be a group of magical creatures that would only appear in mythologies possessing unusual and strange physical characteristics. Firstly, the magical being that is quite similar in appearance to the three-headed mythological watchdog Cerberus. Hagrid's loyal three-headed watchdog named Fluffy, who guards something that is being targeted by Voldemort (Rowling 192). According to Hagrid, Fluffy is bought from a "Greek chappie" that he met in a pub Hagrid lent the dog to Dumbledore to guide something that he could not tell Harry and the others about (Rowling 192). The unknown item that is being guarded by Fluffy is the Sorcerer's stone or the one element that can resurrect Voldemort so that he can wreak havoc at Hogwarts. The role of Fluffy here is to guard and protect the area and not to let anyone, including Voldemort, get past the trapdoor where the stone is. However, what accounts for the magical quality of Fluffy is his having three heads instead of just one. Nonetheless, the appearance of three heads communicates threat and fear to any human that sees it.

Another mythological creature that appears in the novel is the dragon named Norbert. Although legends say that dragons are ferocious and destructive creatures, especially because they possess abilities such as breathing fire etc. Norbert is a dragon that has drawn out compassion in each of the characters in the story. In fact, Harry and his friends, including Hagrid, have seen Norbert hatch from an egg (Rowling 235). Norbert is a dragon whose existence is protected by Harry and his friends at all costs from those who want to kill him, in which Harry and his friends also try to protect Hagrid from the violation of owning such a destructive creature. Although the dragon plays a minor role in the story, it draws out the sympathy of Harry and his friends in protecting a feeble and kind creature that everyone in the world of magic thinks is dangerous. Nonetheless, the dragon has nurtured the friends' compassion and has made them see things differently from others.

Unicorns have appeared in ancient Roman and Greek art, and in the Harry Potter series, the students learn that their horns held the magical abilities of healing and purification. As a creature with a generally harmless and soft personality, unicorns are depicted in the story as possessing blood that can give immortality to someone. Harry and his friends find a dead unicorn because Voldemort has been feeding on their blood for his immortality (Rowling 255). They have beauty and grace that popular legends speak of, as well as the supreme quality of immortality through their blood. Therefore, whomever the unicorn has come into contact within the story has been given the gift of immortality through sacrifice. This is why Voldemort kills a unicorn for its blood in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.

One of the prime reasons for the overwhelming success of Rowling's books is how she masterfully blurs the line between the familiar and the new, and questions the treatment of animals as subhuman. Indeed, the animals in Rowling's world play a more significant role than simply invigorating the fictional world she has constructed. Primarily, these animals are characters and play crucial roles in the plot. Furthermore, Rowling utilizes animals and creatures of myth to make much of the abstract that is the core of her work tangible. Although

Rowling does not fully develop any of the non-human animals in Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone, they play an essential role in helping develop and establish the sense of self of many characters, especially within the various social spaces that she constructs in the text. Some animals appear in the series, forming a crucial part of the Potter family. Others render crucial services to the wizard-ing community, without which the plot would be bland, such as the owls. Others go on to hold crucial roles in the plot, becoming important characters in the narrative in their own right.

The animals in Rowling’s world are magical creatures that have a strong connection to humans in general. These animals speak to humans, act as their intelligent messengers, and teach them the nurturing spirit through loyalty, compassion, and sacrifice. Overall, these animal characters represent an Edenic, Paradise-like world where there seems to be no gap between man and all creatures and where both communicate with each other. Indeed, the animal world is extremely essential and critical in Harry’s world, and both shapes and reflects the complexity of the Harry Potter Universe.