"Powerful Infatuations": The Love Potion and *Harry Potter*'s Ethics of Consent

Kabir Chattopadhyay, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland

Abstract

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books have been remarkably successful on a global scale, and have been lauded for their optimistic, affectively celebratory visions of justice, ethics, and individual freedom. At the same time, a number of scholars including Farah Mendlesohn, Jack Zipes, and Maria Nikolajeva have pointed out the problematic conservatism and ethical insufficiency of the texts' moral visions, which perpetuate a stultifying vision of autonomy. In this article, I seek to highlight the ideological roots of this vision in a late capitalist rationale of self-interest, with a focus on the texts' treatment of romantic relationships and issues of consent, by analysing depictions of the love potion. My article explores the different narrative strategies employed in *Harry Potter* to shift readerly attention away from the problematic aspects of a magical commodity, whose function is to manipulate consent and autonomy, by instead highlighting them as amusing, largely harmless artefacts of wizardly childhood. Such strategies, as shall be explored, range from comic relief and abrupt narrative breaks in the form of foils to reversal of real-world gender associations and sanitisation of teenage romantic narratives. By examining how a popular fantasy text dilutes the issues of consent and coercion with reference to such an object, I seek to illuminate how the contemporary neoliberal ethos of the books participates in the reconfiguration of autonomy in terms of individual self-interest. Such a reconfiguration has a pervasive and significant influence not only on socio-economic behaviour, but also on cultural depictions of socio-romantic agency and perceptions of consent, autonomy, and manipulation.

Introduction

1 Very few contemporary texts of children's fantasy, and more broadly, children's literature, have enjoyed as much commercial success, or had as substantial an impact on global popular culture, as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books. As of February, 2018, the seven books in the series have been translated into 80 languages all over the world, and have sold an excess of 500 million copies. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Peter Mandaville identify the global impact of the fantasy narrative, and posit that "it may be a slight exaggeration to compare the success of the Harry Potter books to the Bible, but the extent of the books' reach cannot be doubted" (Jackson and Mandaville 45). It is this global popularity of *Harry Potter* that necessitates a careful academic consideration of the ethical messages transmitted to young readers, following Jack Zipes' argument that "it is exactly because the success of the Harry Potter novels is so great and reflects certain troubling sociocultural trends that we must try to evaluate the phenomenon" (Zipes 172). Much of the narrative appeal of the texts derives from the central metaphor of magic in the fantasy, portrayed most concretely in terms of the various

magical objects and artefacts which saturate the wizardly life of the child characters. Such objects, while drawn from older cultural narratives of magic, double in the texts as commodities - objects of "wizardly technologies [which] may not look like the commodities we are used to… nonetheless marketed and consumed as ours are" (Teare 340). The narrative often frames instances of autonomy and individual agency within the acquisition and use of such magical commodities.

2 When considering how this narrative device frames commodities as the material loci for young readers to approach images of autonomy, it also becomes important to acknowledge how such commodities simultaneously raise certain important ethical questions which accompany the notion of individual agency. *Harry Potter* does offer certain instances for the reader in which questions of ethics are raised with respect to the use and sale of potentially dangerous magical commodities. The character of Hermione Granger, for example, is offered as an occasional interlocutor who prescribes and sometimes enforces responsible and disciplined use of such objects in the magical school space. To provide an example, her responsible, somewhat adult, voice dominates her denunciation of Fred and George Weasleys' use of younger students to experiment with potentially dangerous magical commodities; she is shown to confiscate their products, threaten to report them to their mother, and forbids them from using young students as their guinea pigs, even though she "can't stop [them] eating the stupid things" themselves (*Phoenix* 230). While, in this instance, the narrative directly portrays a conflict regarding the ethical use of magical commodities, there are instances and aspects of commodity culture in the books which are never questioned as problematic, yet have pervasive and disturbing suggestions for the reader. The affective optimism of the narrative necessitates an investigation into *how* the narratives successfully elide these problematic aspects of specific commodities.

3 My article seeks to focus on one such commodity which is frequently portrayed in the latter half of the series, namely the love potion, examining similarities between the potion as depicted and its real world counterparts, as well as looking into the troubling socio-historical sources of consent and violation it is drawn from, foregrounding how the re-imagination of the love potion as commodity largely sanitises such aspects. Such an exploration can address how the negation of ethical questions is directly connected to a contemporary, late capitalist ethics of prioritising individual autonomy in terms of self-interest, often in competition with the agency of others.

The Love Potion: The Dilution of Issues of Consent, and Autonomy as Individual Self-Interest

4 The readership of *Harry Potter,* over the course of the seven book series, is presumed to grow up with the characters, and this maturation is evidenced in the changing pattern and nature of commodities which saturate the stories. While the early books are more invested in the child characters' fascination with commodities concerned with play, like Chocolate Frog cards, toys, and magically enhanced eatables, in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,* where Harry is shown to be sixteen years old, and the texts start addressing themes more commonly found in young adult fiction, the love potion makes an appearance. The potion, like other commodities, is also introduced for sale in the marketplace, the use of which requires economic power (*Prince* 117). In keeping with the young adult themes prevalent in the later books, the potion crystallises questions of autonomy with a focus on the ethics of coercion, consent, and subversion of personal freedom in romantic relationships. These questions, however, are raised largely in a humorous and somewhat more frivolous manner than in other works of young adult fiction.[1] This is evidenced when the potion is introduced for the first time to the reader, clearly as 'joke items' among other similar commodities for sale in the market. The reader is told that they are "violently pink products", a commodity targeted primarily at young female consumers, in a conversation which offers some light humour at the expense of the young Ginny Weasley, concerning her romantic relationship with a classmate (*Prince* 117). This gendering of the commodity as a largely 'feminine' product is a distinct narrative strategy aimed at distancing the love potion and its use from the differently gendered real-world use of similar products the young adult reader will be familiar with. However, even at the level of the story, Rowling cannot avoid highlighting the problematic aspect of using the potion, although much of the seriousness is elided by slapstick humour.

5 Ron, who is frequently employed as a comic foil to other characters in his bluntness and regular display of confusion (and sometimes, in his treatment of Hermione, derision) towards more cerebral issues, is the figure Rowling uses to frame the love potion as undesirable but not overly serious. When Harry is shown to refuse the romantic overtures of a fellow student named Romilda, the latter tries to trick him into consuming a love potion hidden in chocolates. Harry avoids this, as the ever-sensible figure of Hermione is shown to warn him

1 One of the early examples of this would be Judy Blume's *Forever,* where issues of consent, adolescent sexual desire, and the need for frank, serious communication dominates the relationship of the central characters. See Judy Blume, *Forever* (Macmillan, 1975).

against this act of subterfuge, and the potion is accidentally ingested by Ron instead (*Prince* 366-369). This (mis)use of the love potion cannot avoid raising questions of coercion and consent in romantic/sexual relationships; questions pointedly averted through two distinct narrative strategies in this episode. Firstly, Ron's over-the-top buffoonish behaviour provides a slapstick comic relief for the reader, which offers humour as the chief filter through which this incident is read. For the reader, this is communicated in Ron punching Harry, and while the latter levitates him into the air in rebuttal, Ron keeps asking to introduce him to Romilda.

> 'Romilda?' he repeated. 'Did you say Romilda? Harry - do you know her? Can you introduce me?' Harry stared at the dangling Ron, whose face now looked tremendously hopeful, and fought a strong desire to laugh. A part of him — the part closest to his throbbing right ear – was quite keen on the idea of letting Ron down and watching him run amok until the effects of the potion wore off…but on the other hand, they were supposed to be friends, Ron had not been himself when he had attacked, and Harry thought that he would deserve another punching if he permitted Ron to declare undying love for Romilda Vane. (*Prince* 369)

6 This use of slapstick to frame the episode as largely humorous is complemented by the second strategy of diverting readerly attention from the misuse of the love potion to a grim incident of far deeper implications, as Ron is almost immediately shown to be poisoned as part of a conspiracy by Voldemort (*Prince* 372-373). What this strategy draws attention away from is a more complex engagement with the love potion in the texts. On one level, the love potion may ostensibly be read as an apparent material embodiment of abstract notions of romantic or sexual attraction, a symbolic object which would not be uncommon in a fantasy text. However, as we are informed earlier in the book through the figure of Horace Slughorn, the old potions master, the love potion "doesn't really create *love*...this will simply cause a powerful infatuation or obsession" (*Prince* 177). The object is thus firmly located outside the realm of true love, and in the domain of manipulating desire and obsession. Rowling's narrative use of humour, and the introduction of a greater crisis as *deus ex machina*, thus draws readerly attention away from dwelling too long on the problematic aspect of the love potion; the fact that the chief purpose of this commodity lies in its overpowering the target's independent, cognitive faculties to manufacture a form of artificial attraction, a perverse and corrupted simulation of love, expressly against the victim's consent.

7 There is thus a palpable problem in the texts' categorisation of the love potion along with other, more harmless magical collectibles, a depiction which is facilitated by the portrayal

of the Weasley twins' sale of such products in their joke shop. At the affective level, the twins are unequivocally portrayed in a positive and humorous light. They are shown to have unparalleled knowledge of all the secret passages and rooms in the enchanted school castle, frequently disrupting everyday schedule by pulling pranks on students, teachers and ghosts alike, and featuring as the go-to-guys for any of the students who wish to acquire forbidden or illicit eatables, joke items or other magical accessories – attributes overtly depicted as exciting and attractive. In their cultural peer group, their ability to procure exciting and affectively appealing magical commodities, in particular, turns them into celebrities of sort in episodes such as the one following Gryffindor's Quidditch victory in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.*

> It felt as though they had already won the Quidditch Cup; the party went on all day and well into the night. Fred and George Weasley disappeared for a couple of hours and returned with armfuls of bottles of Butterbeer, pumpkin fizz and several bags full of Honeydukes sweets. 'How did you do that?' squealed Angelina Johnson, as George started throwing Peppermint Toads into the crowd. (*Azkaban* 195)

8 The twin's rule-breaking is celebrated by their peers as a mark of great achievement, and is contrasted sharply with the narrative dullness of foil characters who are depicted as disciplinarians. David K. Steege, reading the influences of the genre of the British school story in the books, discusses how "Rowling…perpetuates the common notion of prefects…in a subtle struggle to maintain their position and dignity with the younger students" (Steege 147). The figure of Percy Weasley, the twins' pompous elder brother (*Azkaban* 50), is consistently used as a "self-important and authoritarian" foil to their spontaneity in the texts, setting him up primarily as "a target for humour, particularly by his twin brothers" (Steege 147). Although (and to some extent, because) the twins are presented as such rule-breakers, a behaviour frowned upon by more authoritative figures, their disregard for discipline is never portrayed as cruel or ethically problematic, being "motivated only by what amuses them" (Whited and Grimes 196). Overall, the Weasley twins are generally appreciated in the language of the narrative as boisterous but friendly troublemakers, unlike other 'bullying' figures. Indeed, Harry is shown to use them consciously as a moral compass of sorts. When it is revealed that Harry's father was an unpleasant young bully as a student, Harry tries to justify his behaviour by comparing him with the twins but fails to rationalise that the twins would ever behave like his father in "dangling someone upside-down for the fun of it" (*Phoenix* 575).

9 On the ethical spectrum, Rowling firmly sets the twins on the 'good' side. The sale of love potions as amusing joke shop commodities, endorsed by such overtly 'good' and attractive characters, therefore dilutes to a considerable extent the two conflicting aspects of such a commodity. At one level, the purchase and use of this commodity, much like the twins' other products, depicts for the reader in clear terms the child consumers' socio-economic autonomy in the marketplace. However, unlike other commodities whose role is simply to play pranks on others, the love potion necessarily functions through the *subversion and overpowering* of the autonomy of its intended target; the consumers of this commodity can express their autonomy *only through* the negation of another's. Like many of the magical objects which populate *Harry Potter,* this aspect of the love potion reinforces and perpetuates the associations surrounding it in older European narratives on witchcraft it borrows from, narratives which may provide a historical context to the love potion's pervasive tension with the issue of autonomy.

10 From early modern times onwards, the potion has functioned as a popular political and cultural image depicting the threat posed by witches to civilised Christian society. In *A Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts on Witchcraft and the Second Sight* (1820), a detailed account is provided of the trial of a Doctor Fian. He is allegedly a wizard who is found guilty of an attempt to bewitch a young woman with a concoction brewed with the help of a hair taken from her body, which would coerce her magically into having a sexual relationship with him against her will. The primary threat posed by such magical power lies in its perceived ability to manipulate the agency of its victims, thus coming into direct conflict with the fundamental Christian tenet of the free will of individuals (Webster 30). Such historical European narratives deeply inform Rowling's depiction of the love potion. Of course, in *Harry Potter,* magic is no longer shown to be derived from Satanic sources, but rather organised as a discipline where magical knowledge is safeguarded, shared, and trained within the academic community of Hogwarts. However, the threat of coercion is still preserved as a problematic undercurrent to the love potion as a trope borrowed from older narratives. While the potion thus moves from the early modern Christian to the largely secular contemporary context, it is necessary to examine how its primary image as a tool to overcome consent/autonomy is reinforced for the reader according to contemporary social discourse about agency and consent. Self-expression which denies the autonomy of another agent, while considered a threat to the Christian tenet of free will, can occupy a quite different register in the socio-economic context of a contemporary text – a context which is informed by the primacy of individual autonomy in *Harry Potter.*

11 This contemporary economic context of Rowling's texts is deeply involved in a late capitalist, neoliberal ethos. The magical world of *Harry Potter*, Karin E. Westman contends, is constructed in terms that are recognisably modern, global and "late capitalist" in the "post-Thatcher" neoliberal mode (Westman 306). Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Brian Folker further comment on how the witches and wizards of the books "live in nation-states, identify with the countries of their origin, [and] have developed state structures that are similar to our own" (Sterling-Folker and Folker 103). Considering this specific socio-economic context, self-expression as simultaneously self-serving is not an entirely unexpected narrative construction. Neoliberalism can be differentiated from the older, classical liberal economic ideology in its deep and far-reaching impact not only on economic life, but also on the social and personal behaviour of individuals inhabiting this culture (Hamilton 54-59, Sugarman 103-106). In Rowling's texts, the love potion represents a site of self-expression of the reader's autonomy, and a commodity perpetuating, in the sphere of romantic agency and gender relations, the notion of autonomy as an expression of the 'self' in terms of individualistic self-interest. The love potion in *Harry Potter* is thus an object as concerned with love or romantic attraction as it is with its role as consumer commodity to advance the user's self-interest, and self-centred autonomy (Sen 4-21).

12 It needs to be pointed out here that Rowling demarcates her 'good' characters from the 'bad' through their individual decisions to use/misuse such commodities; using the love potion is clearly a violation of the other's autonomy, and truly kind or empathetic focalising characters are not shown to be using it. However, the existence of the potion itself for potential misuse, and casual references to it as harmless even by Hogwarts teachers (*Chamber* 176), is not interrogated in the texts, and the questions of ethical activity are subtly transferred to individual choice in using the potion, rather than to an investigation into the existence of it as a market commodity. This narrative strategy is involved in a construction of ethical action for the reader around the locus of individual responsibility, while suggesting that such objects, regardless of their potential for harm, shall continue to circulate in the market as a given. On an ideological level, this construction can be assessed as resonant with the neoliberal transformation in popular culture of the "purpose of the state from a responsibility to protect its citizens against the exigencies of the market to insuring protection of the market itself" (Wren and Waller 500).

13 It follows, then, that this model of "individualistic ethics based on self-interest" within an economic community in which each individual *homo economicus* is guided by self-interest, will necessarily "atomise people as individuals who must compete with each other to succeed" (Littler 2). On the level of the text, this vision of competition not only dominates narratives of

success, but also has deeply pervasive influences on how romantic/sexual interest and action are portrayed for young readers. The love potion, in this context, functions as a site of conflict not simply between two subjects in the process of a romantic transaction, but also between two reciprocal autonomies. That such an object is very much in place within the competitive ideology of self-interest the texts are informed by is evidenced by its re-imagination as a market commodity, unlike its depiction as a liminal, dangerous product of an individual witch's malicious intent as in older narratives.

14 Looking at the love potion from this distinct socio-economic perspective, explains how the ideological constructions of the text privilege its depiction as an amusing, desirable commodity in the market place, rather than highlighting the problematic notions of consent and coercion in relation to it. Rowling's conscious dilution of the love potion as mere 'joke' item is evidenced in the narrative regularly, most overtly when Hermione dissociates them from truly dangerous artefacts by claiming that "love potions aren't dark or dangerous" (*Prince* 288). As discussed in case of Romilda, the problems of her attempt to manipulate Harry's autonomy are somewhat suppressed by the humorous framing of the narrative. Even when a discussion of the love potion enters the story in a considerably disturbing and sinister manner, a possibility of serious introspection is introduced by Rowling only to be dismissed in a rather abrupt narrative moment. This episode reveals to the reader that Voldemort, the antagonist, was conceived while his non-magical father was under the influence of love potion secretly given to him by his magical mother, Merope Gaunt, whom he abandoned the moment the influence of the potion had ended (*Prince* 201-202). Rowling introduces a truly complex moment in Harry's ethical development when she portrays him considering the unfair and difficult circumstances of his enemy's birth and childhood, with the image of rape looming in the background, only to abruptly end the conversation not with a logical introspection, but with a comparison to a foil character.

> 'In any case, as you are about to see, Merope refused to raise her wand even to save her own life.' 'She wouldn't even stay alive for her son?' Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. 'Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?' 'No,' said Harry quickly, 'but she had a choice, didn't she, not like my mother —' 'Your mother had a choice too,' said Dumbledore gently. 'Yes, Merope Riddle chose death in spite of a son who needed her, but do not judge her too harshly, Harry. She was greatly weakened by long suffering and she never had your mother's courage'. (*Prince* 246)

15 Much like in the instance of Ron's poisoning closing the episode of his ingesting the love potion, Rowling once again avoids a problematic instance in the story by using a foil in the form of Lily Potter's greater courage, offering only a pitiful comment on Merope's innate lack of the same, before Dumbledore's voice abruptly draws narrative attention away to Harry's next lesson (*Prince* 246). Farah Mendlesohn's observation that the conflict between good and evil in *Harry Potter* is actually a struggle between "two competing visions of aristocracy" (Mendlesohn 169) can be illuminated in such a narrative strategy. In offering a moral standpoint concerning the (mis)use of love potions and the abandonment of children, the text centres its commentary on the inferior behaviours of a weak individual, rather than the structurally problematic magical object at her disposal. In other words, the problematic aspect of a love potion is somewhat diluted in the suggestion that only morally compromised or weak characters ever seem to use it. Through this association, the love potion becomes an extension of the ethical inferiority of characters like Merope and Romilda, rather than a deeply dubious commodity in its own right.

16 The narrative strategy of highlighting the love potion as a necessary commodity for self-expression, even when this takes the form of subverting the autonomy of others, particularly necessitates academic attention, as such commodities are not unfamiliar in the real world. The love potion in the books is not meant to be ingested voluntarily, but is always associated with the act of tricking or deceiving an unsuspecting victim into having it. This image of 'slipping' the potion into someone's drink necessarily invokes a serious contemporary social problem involving narcotics commonly referred to as 'date-rape drugs.' The love potion, in its purpose and intent, is disturbingly similar to such narcotics, and Rowling uses two major narrative strategies to dissociate the love potion from this real-world counterpart, desexualising teenage life in the books, and reversing gender associations with the love potion.

17 The first strategy introduces an image of teenage romantic attention in which the sexual aspect is diluted or even negated. The children in the texts are not shown to indulge in activities any more physical than kissing, and even when characters like Romilda attempt to use the love potion, their motives are expressed in the somewhat euphemistic terms of wanting to 'go out' with someone.[2] There is no detailed discussion of feelings of physical attraction and consecutive teenage sexual experience, and romantic narratives are mostly sanitised. The threatening image of the love potion as something disturbingly similar to the date-rape drug is

2 This is a consistent aspect in the texts' depiction of love. Even adult romantic relationships emphasise not on sexuality, but on abstract notions like domestic affection (Mr. and Mrs. Weasley), courage and nobility (Bill and Fleur, Lupin and Tonks), or the relief in finding someone similar (Hagrid and Madame Maxime).

downplayed to a large degree through this narrative strategy of dissociating sexual activity from romantic attraction. Thus, Romilda's attempt to enforce Harry's consent by giving him a love potion is tempered largely by the narrative insistence that her intentions are limited to "hinting heavily that she would like to go to Slughorn's Christmas party with [Harry]" (*Prince* 281). Removing the sexual aspect of romantic attraction, therefore, dilutes most of the potential narrative sharpness in perceiving love potions in terms of date rape drugs, at the level of the reader.

18 Secondly, a more subtle strategy adapted by Rowling in distancing the love potion from the date-rape drug can be detected in the inversion of the gendered associations of the use of such a commodity. Statistical analyses demonstrate that the victims of date rape globally are overwhelmingly female, while purchase and use of the common date-rape drugs is largely limited/confined to male users (Muehlenhard, Sympson, Phelps, and Highby 144-146, and Valentine 22-29). In *Harry Potter*, this social reality is inverted through the depiction of the love potion as both, being targeted at female consumers in the market as well as (more frequently) being used by women. This gendering of a magical object concerned with romantic relationships derives in no small part from the somewhat stereotypical description in Rowling's texts of girls as more aware of emotional and romantic affairs than the boys who are mostly shown to be affably clueless. This contrast is used to provide humorous incidents of male characters learning to understand the intricacies of the social etiquette of dating, as evidenced in Hermione's admonitions of Harry's disastrous date with Cho Chang.

> 'Oh, Harry' she said sadly. 'Well, I'm sorry, but you were a bit tactless.' 'Me, tactless?' said Harry, outraged. 'One minute we were getting on fine, next minute she was telling me that Roger Davies asked her out and how she used to go and snog Cedric in that stupid teashop - how was I supposed to feel about that?' 'Well, you see,' said Hermione, with the patient air of someone explaining that one plus one equals two to an over-emotional toddler, 'you shouldn't have told her that you wanted to meet me halfway through your date.' "But, but," spluttered Harry, "but - you told me to meet you at twelve and to bring her along, how was I supposed to do that without telling her?' (*Phoenix* 504)

19 Harry's inability to understand how he has offended his love interest, and Hermione's exasperated, matronly patience in educating him, provide a humorous account of the bumbling boy hero's socio-romantic development. However, in the context of the love potion, this gendering also serves the purpose of distancing the potion from its real-world equivalent and

depicting it as something that is, if not harmless, then at least not actively harmful as an instrument of sexualised violence in the hands of largely male perpetrators. For the reader, these narrative choices construct a curated image of the love potion as a commodity that is not much different from other magical eatables or prank items as desirable objects to own and use. The presence of these conscious strategies in the texts highlight an ideological necessity in the narrative to avoid introspection into possible problematic readings of the structures of self-expression it communicates.

20 Gender, and the romantic/social engagement between male and female characters in *Harry Potter,* is thus presented in a largely sanitised light in the books. Such a depiction allows the texts to represent the love potion as a largely harmless commodity, whose role in manipulating consent is presented not in the sinister context of abuse and gender violence, but in the frivolous, even playful, language of pranks and jokes. On the affective level, this invites the reader to approach the commodity (and through it, issues of romantic agency) in terms which are pointedly not introspective. At the same time, this allows the texts to use the image of this commodity to frame personal, romantic, and emotional visions of action in terms which are deeply influenced by the individualised vision of autonomy as self-interest.

Conclusion

21 The notion of individual autonomy, and visions of child characters taking important ethical decisions and exercising their agency, has always been integral to the genre of fantasy literature. Colin Manlove argues how children's fantasy in England has largely been concerned with "broad patterns of behavior that have guided humanity to its best achievements," and while he observes in post-1950s fantasy literature a growing insecurity about ethical ideals, he relates the immense popularity of Rowling's texts to her depiction of "school life…founded on a social structure and values no longer to be found in the outside world" (Manlove 201). In other words, Rowling's focus on the issue of autonomy is very much a part of the tradition of English fantasy. However, the attributes of freedom and individual autonomy are equally central to the functioning of the contemporary neoliberal economic machinery; the late capitalist market demands a constant supply of pro-active participants, acting ostensibly out of self-interest and self-expression (Steger and Roy 5-20). It is imperative for any governmentality concerned with such an economic society to effect, as Michel Foucault contends, this identification of individual economic autonomy with the affective optimism of personal freedom (Foucault 19-43). *Harry Potter* as a work of fantasy, a genre already familiar with

narratives of autonomy, provides an effective literary mode to participate in the cultural perpetuation of this popular vision of freedom-as-individual autonomy.

22 What makes the love potion a particularly important object of study in the analysis of such autonomy in *Harry Potter* is the *specific* construction of autonomy as not mere self-expression but also an active pursuit of self-interest *in conflict with* another's autonomy, while concealing the more problematic aspects of such self-seeking consumer behaviour through the strategies discussed. As discussed, a substantial amount of work has been undertaken by children's literature scholars with regards to issues of gender and the female voice in *Harry Potter*. My particular focus on the love potion, however, seeks to highlight the pervasive influence of the social principle of self-interest on contemporary life. In its contemporary incarnation, it is a principle which seeks to govern and re-organise not only contemporary economic activity, but also social and subjective agency in spheres as personal and fundamental as romantic/sexual desire and behaviour. Within the principles of neoliberal social behaviour, as Jeff Sugarman argues, "relationships are reduced to means-ends calculations, and pursued solely for self-interest, and emotional self-optimisation" (Sugarman 111). While *Harry Potter* does uphold the role and power of selfless love in the larger quest narrative, the model of social behaviour concerning relationships as Sugarman discusses, still asserts itself in the more immediate instances through the depiction of objects like the love potion. Personal freedom and individuality remain important concepts in *Harry Potter*, although they often covertly structure and reproduce what scholars have described as an immutable status quo. Rowling's depictions of magical commodities like love potions help illuminate this status quo as governed by a distinctly neoliberal emphasis on the atomised ethos of maximising self-interest, and allow the identification of *what* specific politico-economic ideologies the often criticised conservatism of the texts entails. Within modern, neoliberal life, even perceptions and constructions of gender and romantic agency are not entirely untouched by the all-pervasive principle of the *homo economicus*, or the rational human guided solely by self-interest. The 'unproblematic' and humorous depiction of a deeply conflicting commodity such as the love potion, in a work of children's fantasy which has been globally lauded for its optimistic visions of freedom, offers a significant pointer towards this pervasive cultural process whereby neoliberal self-interest penetrates deep into everyday exercises of socio-romantic autonomy.

Works Cited

"500 million Harry Potter books have now been sold worldwide." *Pottermore*, 1 Feb., 2018, https://www.pottermore.com/news/500-million-harry-potter-books-have-now-been-sold-worldwide. Accessed 16th March, 2019.

Blume, Judy. *Forever.* Macmillan, 1975.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France, 1978-79.* Edited by Michel Senellart and translated by Graham Burchell. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Hamilton, Clive. "Observations on Late Consumer Capitalism." *Australian Quarterly,* vol. 79, no. 3, 2007, pp. 54-59.

Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus, and Peter Mandaville. "Glocal Hero: Harry Potter Abroad." *Harry Potter and International Relations*, edited by Daniel H. Nexon and Iver B. Neumann, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006, pp. 45-60.

Littler, Jo. *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power, and Myths of Mobility.* Routledge, 2018.

Manlove, Colin. *From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England.* Cybereditions Corporation, 2003.

Mendlesohn, Farah. "Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Construction of Authority." *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, edited by Lana A. Whited, Missouri University Press, 2002, pp. 159-181.

Muehlenhard, Charlene L., Susie C. Sympson, Joi L. Phelps, and Barrie J. Highby. "Are Rape Statistics Exaggerated? A Response to Criticism of Contemporary Rape Research." *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1994, pp. 144-146.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.* Bloomsbury, 1998.

---. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.* Bloomsbury, 2000.

---. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.* Bloomsbury, 2003.

---. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince.* Bloomsbury, 2005.

Sen, Amartya K. "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1977, pp. 317-344.

Steege, David K. "Harry Potter, Tom Brown, and the British School Story: Lost in Transit?" *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, edited by Lana A. Whited, Missouri University Press, 2002, pp. 243-258.

Steger, Manfred B., and Ravi K. Roy. *A Very Short Introduction to Neoliberalism.* Oxford University Press, 2010.

Sterling-Folker, Jennifer, and Brian Folker. "Conflict and the Nation-State: Magical Mirrors of Muggles and Refracted Images." *Harry Potter and International Relations*, edited by

Daniel H. Nexon and Iver B. Neumann, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006, pp. 103-126.

Sugarman, Jeff. “Neoliberalism and Psychological Ethics.” *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2015, pp. 103-106.

Teare, Elizabeth. “Harry Potter and the Technology of Magic.” *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, edited by Lana A. Whited, Missouri University Press, 2002, pp. 329-342.

Valentine, Gill. “Images of Danger: Women’s Sources of Information about the Spatial Distribution of Male Violence.” *Area*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1992, pp. 22-29.

Webster, D., editor. *A Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts on Witchcraft and the Second Sight: With an Original Essay on Witchcraft.* Webster, 1820. Manuscript accessed at Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection, Yale University, New Haven. CT.

Westman, Karin E. “Specters of Thatcherism: Contemporary British Culture in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series.” *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, edited by Lana A. Whited, Missouri University Press, 2002, pp. 305-328.

Whited, Lana A., and M. Katherine Grimes. “What Would Harry Do?: J.K. Rowling and Lawrence Kohlberg’s Theories of Moral Development.” *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, edited by Lana A. Whited, Missouri University Press, 2002, pp. 182-208.

Wrenn, Mary V., and William Waller. “Care and the Neoliberal Individual.” *Journal of Economic Issues*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2017, pp. 495-502.

Zipes, Jack. *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter.* Routledge, 2001.