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Slytherin pride: The othering of the Slytherins and their redemption through fandom

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SLYTHERIN PRIDE: THE OTHERING OF THE SLYTHERINS AND THEIR REDEMPTION THROUGH FANDOM

A Thesis

Presented to the

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In Partial Fulfillment

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ABSTRACT

The Slytherin characters of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series are generally thought of as "the bad guys," always causing trouble for the hero and repeatedly taking the wrong side of nearly every fight; however, these characters are not the stereotypical villains that often grace the pages of children's literature. The Slytherins fit the many faces of the Other, giving them a multitude of identities and, hence, making them much more complex than the characteristically static villain role provided in most children's literature. By applying Richard Kearney's interpretations of the Other as a lens in analyzing Rowling's Slytherins, this thesis argues not only how the Slytherins fulfill the role of Other but how the often negative view of otherness is challenged by the actions of many of the Slytherin characters; as well, this thesis illustrates the influence fandom has had in *re*humanizing the Slytherins, culminating in a discussion on fans identifying with these characters. The broadening interpretation of the Other has sparked many fans of the series to recreate the Slytherin characters so as to reflect the fans' own definitions of otherness. Many in the fan community still feel that the Slytherins deserve more compassion, understanding, and the opportunity to be regarded as fully-developed, complete human beings. By taking this rewriting of the Slytherin characters onto themselves, the fans have created a culture that defies the norms of otherness while embracing the label of Other and, in the end, redefining what otherness means in modern times.

To

My multitude of friends for all of the laughs and advice,

J.K. Rowling for her awesome brilliance,

A certain Ravenclaw for being friends with a Slytherin and

Letting me be a monster,

And most of all my parents;

I couldn't have ever dreamed of achieving so much

Without your love, support, and wacky senses of humor.

Love you both to bits.

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CHAPTER ONE

OTHERNESS AND *HARRY POTTER*

> Perhaps it was Harry's imagination, after all he'd heard about Slytherin, but he thought they looked like an unpleasant lot.
>
> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Introduction

Harry Potter. In any given crowd of people, saying that name aloud will get a variety of responses: Coy smiles from adult fans, toothy grins and happy whoops from enchanted children, eye-rolling and angry glares from anti-fans, and even scoffs and boos from Harry-haters. However, any response—good or bad—to those two words tells one unquestionable thing about J.K. Rowling's series; the Boy-Who-Lived has become nearly as well-known in our world as he is in Rowling's magical realm. With the release of each new book or film came midnight parties, where kids, teens, and adults participated in *Harry Potter* themed costume contests and trivia games, anxiously awaiting for a minute past midnight to get their hands on the new tome or watch the new flick. Not only have both the books and their film counterparts broken various records in sales, but the expansive amount of merchandise derived from Rowling's creation is a strong testament to the love and obsession many people feel towards Harry and everything associated with him. It's not surprising, then, that a hefty amount of

fan art and fan fiction has been produced as evidence of this craze. One group of fans—popularly known as StarKid on *YouTube*—even went as far as creating farcical musicals called *A Very Potter Musical* and *A Very Potter Sequel* with a third musical in the works due to the popularity of the plays by massive amounts of fans around the world.

However, one of the most fascinating forms of fandom to be inspired by the world of Harry Potter is probably the creation of the musical genre Wizard Rock (Wrock), which was formed out of the popularity of a multitude of *Harry Potter*-inspired bands. Sometimes belting out tunes about the magical world they love and often times singing from the perspectives of Rowling's characters, these fan-created bands have gained such a large and vocal fan-base themselves that they are able to create albums, tour across the country, hold a Woodstock-esque concert each year called Wrockstock, and all of this has been accomplished due to seven books and the love many fans feel for them. Nothing quite like this has ever been accomplished in fandom or on such a large, world-wide scale before that derived from a children's or fantasy series; not even J.R.R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, one of the more recent popular fantasy series to have a large fan-following, can claim such influence as being the books that inspired the creation of a musical genre. There's just something about Harry and his world that *sings* to readers.

Since the Harry Potter craze began, authors, publishers, and theorists alike have attempted to decipher what makes these books so popular. As one

writer explained the phenomenon, "a children's book had opened up a new image for readers, new optimism about reading and, in particular, new thinking about what was possible in children's books" (Eccleshare 105). One particular draw to the books is the inclusion of familiar archetypes. There's a certain amount of satisfaction when reading a story that feels familiar because it's not completely alien to our senses, values, and ideals. Being able to identify those characters that have become so ingrained in how we understand stories—the hero/heroine battling the villain, a knight slaying a monster, warriors, jokers, devils and angels—can give us a sort of gratification. Because we can label the characters by placing them into an archetypal mold, we feel a sense of control when reading a story; we can make judgments about the characters *because* we can label what they are and where they fit in the overall scheme of the plot.

This easy identification of characters' roles could be one of the many reasons why Rowling's books are so widely popular around the world. Harry is a clear-cut hero, battling evil every year at Hogwarts; every small success over evil is just one more step towards destroying the epitome of evil, as represented by the dark wizard, Lord Voldemort. Even the damsel-in-distress appears in the form of Ginny Weasley, Harry's later-to-be wife, and Harry's best friend, Ron Weasley, fills the mold of joker or comic relief. These archetypes and several more are quite easy to identify in Rowling's novels, but there is a group of characters in these books that does not seem to fit into any one archetype, though many critics and typical readers tend to stereotype the characters of this group as villains.

Critics, in particular, oversimplify these characters as the evil Other; however, even though the Slytherins appear to be the archetypal bad guys—filling the roles of bullies, cheaters, sadists, murderers, and just general antagonists, this group represents a much more complex form of the Other. Though monstrous at times, the Slytherins are also the Other due to being unrelating and unfamiliar. Now that the series is complete and the entire story laid out, we can no longer generalize all Slytherins as evil or even bad. This tendency to lump them under one label comes from our desire to easily identify archetypes as black or white, hero or villain, good or bad, but just because the Slytherins are the Other does not mean they are bad. It is the mere fact of the group's otherness status that unfortunately supports the association between evilness and the Slytherins.

We use otherness in our attempts to define ourselves against those who we meet. As Simone de Beauvoir points out in her book, *The Second Sex*, "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself" (xix-xx), making the labeling of the Other second nature and even necessary in order for us to identify and understand ourselves. However, there is a major flaw in our critical thinking. Unfortunately in defining the One and the Other, we tend to accept the idea that being an Other is something negative; however, the Other is much more complex, taking on negative descriptors like monstrous but also more benign and fantastical descriptors like stranger and deity. The Slytherins are the Other in several ways, though many associate

monstrous otherness to these characters. For typical readers and Rowling's characters, being a Slytherin can never mean something good but automatically and consistently means something undesirable and evil. This all-encompassing assumption, of course, is not necessarily accurate when we look closely at how Rowling develops her Slytherin characters over the course of the seven books.

In this thesis, I will show how Rowling uses the Slytherins to question the reader's perceptions of what it means to be Other, that otherness is not a singular interpretation but much more multifaceted. As a result, I will also show how Rowling's take on otherness has influenced fans—as shown in Wrock—to not only view the Other differently but to embrace and celebrate even the most undesirable Other, to not just view the monstrous Other as human but to accept and attempt to understand the Other even in its most unlikeable forms. Considering the great success and influence Rowling's had on children and adults, the idea that Rowling's work has ignited fans to challenge and redefine perceptions of otherness is a great achievement for a series of children's books.

Complexity of the Other: Unknown, Unfamiliar, and Unrelated

> The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality—that of the Self and the Other.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex: The Classic Manifesto of the Liberated Woman*

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. If we cannot stand on our own and be dominant, another option is to join those who dominate us. A desire to be part of the powerful or dominant group is ingrained in us from childhood, whether we wanted to be one of the cool, popular kids or just wanted to be included in a group that shared our hobbies, ideas, or beliefs. Once we found a group that accepted us or that we fit into, we found complacency in being able to identify ourselves as members of that group, and in doing this, we began to form opinions about those who did not belong to our group. We still do this, child and adult, because by doing this, we are able to define who we are by identifying who we are not. Richard Kearney, a modern theorist on otherness, explains that we create this definition of difference because "the figure of the 'stranger' [anyone who is not identifiable as the Self or Same] ... frequently operates as a limit-experience for humans trying to identify themselves over and against others" (3). In other words, we cannot know who we are unless we know who we are not, which requires a labeling of the Self and the Other.

In his book, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, Richard Kearney discusses our perceptions of otherness and the human tendency to vilify and disparage that which is different and strange. He argues that otherness tends to define our perceptions of good and evil, that we see the strange and unfamiliar as defining factors in identifying how something should be

labeled. The labeling of the Other as all-powerful, divine, alien, bad, or even evil derives from our own struggle with the otherness we find in ourselves. Kearney explains that Others like "strangers, gods and monsters...are, deep down, tokens of fracture within the human psyche. They speak to us of how we are split between conscious and unconscious, familiar and unfamiliar, same and other" (4). When confronted with our own otherness, however, we tend to "project onto others those unconscious fears from which we recoil in ourselves" (5). Because we do not want to accept the otherness within us, that which scares us because of its unfamiliarity and permanence, we deny our own otherness and, instead, place it upon the shoulders of another, creating the Other we fear (5). We want to keep what is comforting and identifiable within us and expel what contradicts, resulting in our refusal that the strange or evil is found within. As with dichotomies, the familiar cannot exist without the strange nor good without evil, and since the unfamiliar and evil are not to be found in the Self/Same, they must be found in the Other.

One of the forms of otherness that Kearney discusses, which most of us do not identify with and may be most emotionally reactive to, is the Other as "god":

> Gods are the names given by most mythologies and religions to those beings whose numinous power and mystery exceed our grasp and bid us kneel and worship. Sometimes they are benign, at other times cruel and capricious. But whatever their character they

> refuse to be reduced to the bidding of mortals. Transcending laws of time and space, they readily take on immortal or protean status. Gods' ways are not our ways. They bedazzle and surprise us. It is not ours to reason why. (4)

As humans, we are neither immortal nor powerful as gods are. Gods are more likely than not the least relatable form of Other if for no other reason than our sometimes indescribable reliability on their wisdom, knowledge, love, forgiveness, vengeance and all-around power and influence. This reliability is very much one-sided, making human's relationship with gods lacking in symbiosis; while the majority of the human population greatly relies on gods, the same cannot be said for gods relying on us, making gods the least relatable Other to the Self. Though there are some rare exceptions, most of us do not identify ourselves as deities, though we may claim relation to them, in manner, form, or ideals. Yet, despite our attempts to relate to gods by adopting their demeanor (to do as God would do), their form (as Christian myth claims that man is fashioned after the image of God), or their thoughts and beliefs (seen in many religious zealots who have claimed to know the will of God), we are not gods in many respects and, therefore, find gods to be a form of otherness. There is, respectively, no way that the Self can become a god, keeping the form of Other as god indefinitely separate from the Self.

While gods are not a form of otherness that is understandable or relatable, the "stranger" is a more commonly relatable, though misunderstood, Other. More

simply, the stranger is that which is not normal or understandable to the Self. As Kearney says, we use the stranger to identify what we are by identifying what makes the stranger not like us (3). We create the stranger through our labeling of the Other, by identifying what makes the Self and whether other people fit our criteria or not. The stranger can become part of the Same, if the Self and the stranger can find commonalities or understanding between one another, but more often than not, the stranger remains an Other because of the mystery surrounding it. This mystery can often cause misunderstanding on the part of the Self and, as a result, creates fear for that which is alien. Kearney explains how several cultures have been known to scapegoat the stranger, placing the "ills of society" on strangers in order to segregate or eradicate them, and "this sacrificial strategy furnishes communities with a binding identity, that is, with the basic sense of who is included (us) and who is excluded (them)" (26). If the form of the Other induces fear but the Other is part of society, we often tend to ostracize the Other rather than attempt understanding, and the easiest way to eliminate a threat is to find reason to abolish it, gathering the majority-rule to agree with us. This separation of the Other from us is often the easier answer to the perceived threats of the stranger as it does not require the Same or Self to change in any way, allowing that which separates one from the stranger to remain a dividing force, which is often fear.

However, sometimes the fear we feel towards an Other is valid, and in those cases, it might be because the form of the Other is neither god nor

stranger but, instead, something more sinister—the monstrous Other. As Kearney explains, monsters "defy our accredited norms of identification. Unnatural, transgressive, obscene, contradictory, heterogeneous, mad. Monsters are what keep us awake at night and make us nervous during the day" (4). The monstrous Other is not only strange, but its strangeness is generally offensive to the humanity inside us, so offensive that we are struck with horror. When we label the Other as monster, this does not necessarily mean anatomically or species-wise, but it can mean labeling the Other as inhumane. To be human(e) is to have the ability to choose between good and evil—our souls detect them, hearts know them, head and stomach feel them. But to be a monster, to be inhuman(e), demands that there be an inclination or draw towards evil. We might call a person who drowns kittens a monster or label a dictator who commits genocide as a monster. Hence, when we encounter the Other that lacks humanity, we make a monster out of it, for the monster is as far from being human as we can imagine.

Our relationship to the monstrous Other is different from our relationship to the god or stranger, however, because unlike them, the monster is unalterable. Though still forms of otherness, gods can lose favor in the eyes of their worshippers, possibly losing their godly status, and strangers can become familiars when effort is applied, but monsters tend to be that one form of otherness that can be neither overlooked nor altered. The god may no longer be viewed as a god, the stranger no longer a stranger, but the monster, particularly

in human form, tends to remain a monster indefinitely. We learn to perceive the monster this way beginning in childhood, where monsters in bedtime stories and fairy tales encompass the antagonistic archetypes, including evil witches, wicked stepmothers, insidious fathers, abusive husbands, and murderous strangers to name a few. The characters that fill these roles rarely, if ever, gain their humanity but, instead, are forever monstrous. This unalterable view of the Other that children are presented with is then fixed in their minds, defining the monstrous type of otherness as a permanent state. Many times, this unchanging state of monstrousness is accurate, for the villains are rarely turned into heroes or their wicked intentions changed into good deeds. One exception that may be raised is the beast from the well-known tale of "Beauty and the Beast," yet it cannot be said that the beast loses his monstrousness because he never truly is a monster, lacking humanity. He is a man disguised as a monster who only returns to his humanity/human form, but he is never evil. That is why, as children, we wanted his spell to be broken, and we rejoiced at his release from his curse. If he had truly been a monster, we would not want him to succeed because evil should not win. Once learned, however, we tend to take this view of the monster and apply it in life as we grow older, and unfortunately, our labeling of Others as monsters can be misguided and misleading.

Knowing the difference between good and evil, however, is incredibly complicated, complex, and almost always debatable because each person's view of goodness and evilness differs, so when we label an Other as monstrous, we

are assuming that our perception of evilness, at least, is accurate and unquestionable. This is not a given truth, though, and more times than not, we mislabel the Other as monstrous because we have judged the Other to be evil or vice versa, where evilness is created because an Other is labeled a monster. Yet evilness is not exclusive to the monstrous Other; the simple label of Other can carry with it fear for the strange and unknown, which can turn to hate for the Other and its strangely "evil" ways. There is little logic in this slippery slope of associations, but as Kearney explains, it revolves around our desire that evil does not reside within the Self, so we must find it in what is neither the Self nor Same:

> Ever since early Western thought equated the Good with notions of self-identity and sameness, the experience of evil has often been linked with notions of exteriority. Almost invariably, otherness was considered in terms of an estrangement which contaminates the pure unity of the soul. Strangeness was thought to possess our most intimate being until, as Macbeth's witches put it, 'nothing is but what is not'. Evil was alienation and the evil one was the alien. One of the oldest stories in the book. (65)

Again, this separation of evil from the Self ties to the habit of scapegoating the Other, making it embody our fears and flaws, for being monstrous is not exclusive from gods or strangers. Gods and strangers can be evil as well, though neither is more readily associated with evilness as is the monster. This habit of

associating evilness and general negativity to the Other is where re-envisioning the Other needs to start. If we stopped automatically labeling otherness as something bad, we could start to see more clearly the complexity of the Other, for it is not fair to merely label it as *evil* or *bad*. All Others are not innately bad just as all Self or Same are not innately good, and it is this idea that Rowling attempts to illustrate for her readers in the characterization of the Slytherins, her Other.

Evil Slytherins: The Need to Humanize the Other

When we generalize the characters of Slytherin house as evil, do we merely stereotype each Slytherin as we meet them throughout the series, or do we have cause to view all Slytherins as evil? Does association with an "evil" thing deem one to be evil themselves, or must we consider each individual's merit and actions? Just as some critics of the *Harry Potter* books have labeled the novels' intentions as evil because of their association to witchcraft, we must question the motives of the author in order to discover a thoughtful answer to the questions, "Does Rowling's work attempt to teach witchcraft to children? Is that the intention of the author and her seven novels?" Anyone who has read the books would give a resounding "NO!" to such a claim, and as well, we must question and give as much consideration to our answer before labeling the Slytherins as evil. What are their intentions and actions? However, some critics have generalized the depth and complexity of the Slytherins' otherness, broadly representing them as flat

archetypal villains, only perpetuating the negativity associated with being an Other.

This broad assumption that Slytherins are evil is commonly found in various critical works, particularly those that apply a western Christian-fundamentalist lens. For those critics who have claimed that Rowling's books are evil based on the idea that they promote witchcraft, it's understandable that these same critics would also stereotype Slytherins as evil. However, even though there are critics who argue that *Harry Potter* promotes positive Christian values—such as not killing, stealing, coveting, and the like—the view that Slytherins are evil goes unquestioned and blindly repeated over and over again with no consideration for individual actions and character development. One such critic is Connie Neal, author of *Wizards, Wardrobes and Wookies: Navigating Good and Evil in Harry Potter, Narnia and Star Wars*. As her title suggests, Neal claims to be able to identify good and evil in *Harry Potter*, and in order to do this, she lays out particular characteristics of what identifies a character as being evil. According to Neal, evil is "deceptive," "rebellious and arrogant," accusatory and slanderous, "abusive," "aggressive," and it "causes fear and discouragement" (125-7). Neal uses various examples of evil characters who fulfill many of these characteristics, most of who are followers of the epitome of evil that is Lord Voldemort, yet Neal does not bother to illuminate the fact that many characters deemed good are also guilty of such "evil" traits: Harry and Ron's deceptions in drinking Polyjuice Potion to get information from Draco Malfoy in *Chamber of*

Secrets, the rebelliousness of Harry and his father against school rules, James Potters' arrogance as a Hogwarts student, and Dumbledore's aggressive pursuit of the horcruxes and, later, his unrelenting drive to destroy Voldemort despite the consequence of his and Harry's possible deaths. Neal does not find cause to label such acts as "evil" because the characters are acting for the greater good. All of those who do not act for goodness are deemed evil, including those who do not "ally themselves with good" (Neal 87). In the case of identifying who is evil, according to Neal, the saying "If you're not with us, you're against us" makes her perception of evil quite clear.

It is no surprise, then, that Neal finds the Slytherins to be agents of evil, though she contradicts herself several times. Neal defines Harry's goodness by his rejection of evil in terms of his "aversion to the bully Draco Malfoy" and his desire to not be sorted into Slytherin house upon his arrival at Hogwarts (29, 85). She also explains the Slytherins' association with the snake (serpent) as a sign of the house's evilness (122-3); however, despite her own stereotyping of the characters of Slytherin House, she claims to understand that the other characters who are not associated to the house "must learn not to discriminate against everyone in a certain house or blood-line while trying to protect themselves from a stealthy enemy" (160). She even hesitates to condemn Snape as evil because his actions may be derived from a dedication to fight for the greater good, which takes into consideration his murder of Dumbledore if it is a mercy killing (141-2). Amazingly in Neal's mind, arrogance and deceptiveness are clear signs of evil

intentions, but murder can be questionable. However by the end of her book, Neal falls back on her first assumption that Slytherins are evil, exclaiming her "love [for] the ending to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*" when Dumbledore awards the Gryffindors enough points to beat the Slytherins for the house cup, explaining that "the reader rejoices that good has triumphed over evil once more" (219). The fact that Neal ignores her own contradictions and illogical assumptions about Slytherin House only reinforces the absurdity behind the generalized labeling of Slytherins as evil, and it is this rigid view of the Other that, in the end, leads Neal to misread the novels. Despite many, like Neal, who overlook this illogical generalization, other critics have tried to decipher what evil actually is in terms of what Rowling's work shows readers.

Using *Harry Potter* as an example in their article, "A Skewed Reflection: The Nature of Evil," David and Catherine Deavel argue that evil is nonexistent, in the idea that it is not something that can be placed upon someone or claimed to be inherent; "evil does not really exist in itself, but is a privation, a lacking in what something is supposed to be. It is a lacking of what is good" (132). In this respect, the label of "evil" cannot be simply deigned upon the Slytherins as a group, unless they all are deficient in what makes someone good. Those who are placed within Slytherin House are not put there because they lack the ability to do good, at least according to the attributes the house claims to prize in its students—cunning and ambition. The Slytherins are not evil due to any omission of goodness in them but, in actuality, are *deemed* evil for a number of other

reasons, including the fact that they are offhandedly labeled as the monstrous Other. According to the Deavels, to talk about evil is "to talk about whether people's hearts and minds are working properly. To be fully human is to do the right things, love the right things, and care for the right things. To do evil or to be evil in a certain case is really not something definite, but is a failure to do, love, or care for the right things" (133). Though perhaps it is questionable as to exactly what the Deavels mean by "the right things," the idea that all Slytherins do not act out of concern for "the right things" is ridiculous and disproved in several instances throughout the series. Also, the connection drawn between being inhuman and being evil is sorely misplaced in the case of the Slytherins. The Slytherins are, of course, an Other—various forms of the Other, in fact—but it is their overwhelming association to the monstrous Other that causes them to be labeled evil. The monstrous Other is not human(e), and therefore, as the Deavels explain it, evilness comes from the omission of what makes one human—in short, humanity. Just as the monstrous Other is inhuman, so is that which is evil, and the association between monstrousness and evilness can easily be made through the deficiency of humanity, the monstrous Other becoming the evil Other. Unfortunately, distinction between the types of otherness, in concern to various Slytherin characters, is broadly overlooked, and the entire house is, instead, grouped into the class of the monstrous, inhuman, evil Other. The fact that the Slytherins are treated with such contempt due to their otherness first—before their individual actions—clearly reveals our societal biases towards the

Other, and it is this bias that needs to be checked and rethought if our treatment of and relationship with the Other is ever to change.

No matter how much we may wish differently, how much we may push it away from us, the Other is forever existent, and with its permanence, the Other needs to be recognized and treated with equal consideration and justice. Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, theorist on the Other and perceptions of it, argues that "the way the other imposes its enigmatic irreducibility and nonrelativity or absoluteness is by means of a command and a prohibition: You are not allowed to kill me; you must accord me a place under the sun and everything that is necessary to live a truly human life" (22). Because of its permanence and if we wish to live with the Other harmoniously, we need to change how we see and treat the Other. We cannot judge the Other separately from what we allow ourselves to be judged by, but viewing the Other as similar to us will only occur if we can stop demonizing and scapegoating the Other. Otherwise, misunderstanding and conflict will remain. This same consideration needs to be given to the Slytherins, as well. Though Slytherin House may *appear* to be a mill that continuously produces bullies and murderers, this does not mean that a blanket label should be applied to all Slytherin characters. One way to stop this generalization is to *re*humanize the Slytherins, which begins with altering how we view and accept their otherness.

When not blindly labeled evil due to their otherness, readers can see that Rowling, perhaps unknowingly, questions perceptions of otherness through her

creation and character developments of the Slytherins, the perfect examples of the multifaceted face of the Other. What makes us presume that all Slytherins are evil is our expectation of the villainous archetype they fit into. Of course, Rowling does her best in setting up such an opinion when Hagrid, Harry's first informer about the ins-and-outs of the wizarding world, tells Harry, "There's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 80). No doubt from that moment on, every fan of the boy wizard loathes those found to be from Slytherin House. However, upon settling readers' opinions on how detestable all Slytherins *must* be, Rowling cunningly begins to chip away at the archetypal monster that is Slytherin in order to reveal fragments of humanity and shards of sameness. In providing these revelations, Rowling is able to lift the veils of strangeness and evilness we place on the Slytherins, showing how wrong we and our literary heroes can be in our judgments of the Other. In order to have hope for the humanization of the Other, Kearney postulates that "if we can become more mindful of who the other is ... we will, I am convinced, be less likely to live in horror of the dark. For the dark is all too frequently ... a screen against the advent of strangers unbeknownst and still unknown to us" (28). For Rowling's books, the light in the dark of otherness is the humanity we can discover in Slytherins who fight evil, fight for family, fight for love, and sacrifice their lives so that others may live happily and in peace. Like Harry, Rowling shows us that Others can be heroes too, once we stop judging them prematurely and open ourselves to the idea that the Other may not be so different from

ourselves. As will be discussed in the following chapter, throughout the series, Rowling continually sets up her othered Slytherins as the typical villains, but once she gains the readers' trust in that perception—as her heroes do—Rowling starts to humanize the Other in an effort to show how similar the Slytherins are to the heroes and readers. Despite her attempts to complicate the Slytherin Other, however, she only humanizes them briefly and incompletely before falling prey to the simplification of otherness and the negativity that comes with it by the finale of the series.

CHAPTER TWO

SLYTHERINS AS OTHER AND THEIR HUMANIZATION

> And Phineas Nigellus called, in his high, reedy voice, "And let it be noted that Slytherin House played its part! Let our contribution not be forgotten!"
>
> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

In her article "Otherness in Me, Otherness in Others: Children's and Youth's Constructions of Self and Other," Lucia Rabello de Castro explains her findings on children's perceptions of otherness during her research in five schools in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In studying approximately 105 students from four private schools and one public school, Castro found that from ages 10-17 these students created and sustained conceptions of their selves and others based upon class status and long-standing prejudices. The identities of one's self and the relationships created with others were based upon group identity and labeling of the Other, reminiscent of Beauvoir's claim that the self cannot be determined without also determining the Other (xix-xx). During her observations, Castro identified the need for self identification at the expense of the Other, and because of this, relationships born from such self-preservation were often "tense and hostile" (479). As a result, those who were othered were viewed as "an abject another, cutting off any possibility of identification with the other and, consequently, social bonds" (490).

This perception of their othered peers is not, of course, limited to the children of Brazil. Western culture hasn't created the phrase "kids can be so cruel" for no reason. This prejudice against the Other begins in our childhoods, with continual reinforcement that to be different is to be an outcast and looked down upon. If you're not in the clique, you're a loser. If you don't aspire to be a cheerleader, football jock, team player, "one of us," then there must be something wrong with you. Why else are we encouraged to join groups, follow fashion, and just fit in? To be the Other is to be different, difference can cause us to be outsiders, and being an outsider is generally discouraged as we grow, learning social expectations and creating bonds amongst our peers. It is this adamant dislike of otherness bred into children and youth that Rowling addresses and attempts to alter in her books. With a large number of young readers who look to her young characters as role models, Rowling's work is influential in how the Other should be viewed and treated. One such example is her leading hero, Harry, and his outsider-status amongst his muggle relatives due to his magical prowess and, then again, amongst his wizard peers when he joins the magical world he knows nothing about. Harry is obviously an Other, but his otherness is not permanent because he is the hero, the good guy, who affords respect and adoration from the magical world and Rowling's readers. Harry, however, is not the only Other, and these *other* others are, most of the time, neither praised nor respected because their otherness labels them as unworthy, strange, defective, and even evil.

The *Harry Potter* books, though concluding in the generalized outcome of good triumphing over evil, also present a predicament in the labeling of who is to be the victorious good and who is to be the defeated evil, for they do not make a clear-cut delineation between who's good and who's bad. Readers may assume to know as much, but even Harry must question his first perceptions and discover the true intentions of the characters he encounters, as should Harry's readers. Rowling complicates the dichotomy of good and evil through her approach and treatment of her "evil" characters, the othered Slytherins. For young readers, the Slytherins can easily be viewed as flat characters, unchanging and easily pigeon-holed like many other literary monsters and villains. Rowling, however, challenges this rigid perception of the Other because though characters may be the Other, they are not necessarily also the evil villains. Societal monsters have helped to support the perception that otherness is bad, but Rowling protests this long-standing connection.

With such impressionable readers, Rowling takes on a large task in trying to influence children and youth to consider the Other as more complex than just evil or monstrous. Children, all too often, think in terms of simple dichotomies, which can lead to prejudices and stereotypes, and as children grow, they must learn the realities of the world, that not everything is black and white but, instead, varying shades of gray, or as Sirius puts it, "The world isn't split into good people and Death Eaters" (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 302). In presenting her

complex Others in the form of the Slytherins, Rowling teaches this lesson to her characters and, at the same time, her readers.

Slytherin as Other

When picturing the Other, it is rarely imagined in the form of a school bully. In fact, we tend to generalize that bullies are the ones doing the othering, ridiculing and punishing those who for some reason do not meet the standards of sameness the bully has idealized. In these cases, it is often the nerd, the shy kid, the weakling, or—in literature—the protagonist who is made to feel like the Other, and rarely do we see these bullies, these villains, as the Other because we don't wish to pity or empathize with them. Yet, in Rowling's books, the villainous Slytherins are, in fact, the Other. Of course being villains, it may be simple to label the Slytherins as only the monstrous Other, but in using Richard Kearney's form of otherness as a mirror, per se, it is clear that the Slytherins fulfill a much more complex form of Other by standing in as the Other in the forms of not only societal and animalistic monster but, also, as god and stranger. Understanding the complexity of the Slytherins' otherness is important because, by creating this multifaceted "villain," Rowling is able to somewhat humanize the Other while contradicting the long-standing association of negativity with otherness.

Most easily labeled as such, the Slytherins are first and foremost the monstrous Other due to their overwhelming associations to both animalistic and societal monsters. The house mascot of the snake carries with it such a

stigmatism, harking back to the biblical serpent in the Garden of Eden and the general phobia towards snakes and their deadly venom, that Slytherins are the Other first due to mere association to the snake. Of course in *Chamber of Secrets*, their monstrous otherness is reaffirmed in the wake of the near deaths at Hogwarts due to the giant basilisk snake being controlled by the self-proclaimed heir of Slytherin. In these respects, the snake is in no way a good association for the Slytherins. Such negativity is reinforced in the snake-like embodiment of Voldemort. Proud of his Slytherin heritage, Voldemort takes on the physical aspects of the snake—a flat nose with slits for nostrils and red eyes with snake-like pupils—and he also carries with him a pet snake, Nagini, which not only provides nutrition to Voldemort when he is at his weakest but also performs murderous acts on his behalf and harbors a part of Voldemort's very soul. Voldemort is a perfect example of the Other in its animalistic-monster form, but his actions and those of other Slytherins also reinforce the idea that Slytherins are societal monsters, as well.

There is a surprisingly large number of Slytherins who could be labeled as societal monsters, and not many who are societal monsters in Rowling's world are *not* Slytherins. In general, a societal monster is one who does horrendously taboo things according to society's judgment, and most Slytherins, nearly all known to Harry and readers, fall into this definition: Voldemort and his Death Eaters are torturers and murderers; at such a young age, Draco is willing to be a Death Eater, expected to torture and murder, as well; Narcissa Malfoy, though

not a Death Eater, blindly supports Voldemort's regime like her husband; Snape is just like Draco though his cruelty towards Harry throughout the series also makes him a monster; Crabbe and Goyle, Draco's cronies, continually enjoy and willingly participate in causing others pain (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 573-4), have bullying natures, and Crabbe is especially monstrous in his thoughtless attempt to kill Hermione in the Room of Requirement during the final battle at Hogwarts; and lastly, the Black family, excepting Sirius, supported Voldemort and had a blind prejudice towards non-purebloods, disowning family members for expressing sympathies towards muggles and half-bloods. Even when characters' house affiliations are unknown, cruelty links them to Slytherin House in readers' minds. Though Rowling has yet to specify, fans have reached a consensus that Dolores Umbridge is a member of Slytherin House due to her torture of many of Hogwarts' students, her prejudices, and her heading of the Muggle-born Registration Commission, Rowling's equivalent to the unjustly mandated Jewish registration during WWII by the Nazis. Dolores is an extremely detestable character, but even without her, Slytherin House seems to turn out some of the wizarding world's most disgraceful, detestable, and fear-invoking wizards and witches. Though Slytherin House is not the *only* house to contain children of Death Eaters (Rowling, "*Mugglenet*") and to turn out murderers (i.e. – Peter Pettigrew, a.k.a. Wormtail, from Gryffindor House), it is somewhat overwhelmingly associated to such deplorable characters, and as is seen in the case of Dolores Umbridge, monstrous characters are naturally assumed to be

products of Slytherin House. Though overwhelmingly they are identifiable as societal monsters, the Slytherins can also be tied to a more unique type of Other—god.

Though only used in one particular incident, Rowling uses the godly Other in the form of Lord Voldemort. Voldemort is not, of course, an actual god, but his legend makes him as such in the eyes of many of Rowling's characters, both followers and enemies. As explained in chapter one, Kearney defines gods in terms of their "power and mystery [that] exceed our grasp and bid us kneel and worship," and Voldemort is a perfect example of such (4). For those who worship or fear Voldemort, he appears to be an unstoppable force, merciless in his cruelty, all-powerful, and even immortal to a certain extent. His godliness is also apparent in his worshipers and the degree of fear he musters in his enemies. Like some sort of omniscient, demon-like deity that can be conjured from hell, even his name is tabooed, first in only referring to him as He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and You-Know-Who and later literally forbidden to be spoken or else his minions, the Snatchers, will appear upon the utterance of his name. He is even referred to by his followers as the Dark Lord, and although this can mean "lordly"—a British title of class and status—it can also be interpreted as meaning deity; since Voldemort is so set against his mortal coils, I would argue the latter is most likely what is meant, in his mind at the very least. The great power Voldemort exudes in his god-like otherness affects Slytherins as a whole and the dynamic nature of their otherness. They are not only looked upon as just

monsters, but they can also claim a great power within their ranks, causing even more fear of these Others. Despite being "the bad guys," they can ascend to great heights of power and control, which only reinforces fear of them. However, regardless of the few who are monstrous or god-like, in actuality *most* Slytherins are only strangers, neither good nor bad as far as readers and the heroic trio know; however, these mysterious, unknown Slytherins are often feared for merely the association they have to the House, whether they have acted badly towards others or not.

The fact that Rowling's Slytherins are the unfamiliar Other is what really changes how Rowling wants the Other to be understood, as something more than just evil striving for domination and power. The Slytherins' stranger status is what allows Rowling to begin humanizing them as the books progress. Both characters and readers have heard about Slytherin House, its founder, and its disreputable associations with monsters and the Dark Lord, but who Slytherin House is made up of is very vague. There are the few Slytherins who are visible—Voldemort, Snape, Draco, and his cronies—but the vast majority of Slytherins is a complete mystery. All that is suspected about Slytherins—their support for Voldemort, obsession with pure blood, and a desire to be bad and possibly evil—is just that...suspect. And though not much else is known about the characters from Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff either, the Slytherins' unfamiliarity is different because their connections to fearful things and people make their strangeness fearful, as well. Kearney explains this habit as a human tendency to

rely on past experiences for guidance:

> The demonizing of "strangers" by individuals or nations may thus be interpreted as a harking back to past repressed materials which recur in the present—often with obsessive compulsion—in the guise of something threatening and terrifying. But, ironically, what we most fear in the demonized other is our own mirror image: our othered self. (75)

Not only do the Slytherins have a bad reputation, but the horrors in the past – such as Voldemort's rise to power – and in the present plot of the books – such as the threat of the heir of Slytherin throughout *Chamber of Secrets* – are constant reminders that Slytherins are at fault for a lot of the wizarding world's fears and miseries. The Slytherins' connection to these horrors and the fact that little is known about the Slytherins creates this condemnation of the house on a whole, unfortunately. One such example can be seen when Harry, Ron, and Hermione are captured by the Snatchers, bounty hunters for Voldemort and his corrupted government:

> "What House were you in at Hogwarts?"
>
> "Slytherin," said Harry automatically.
>
> "Funny 'ow they all thinks we wants to 'ear that," jeered Scabior out of the shadows. (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 450).

The assumption made, not only by Harry but apparently by others caught before him, is that to be in Voldemort's good graces one must claim to be from Slytherin

House; however, as one of the Snatchers reveals, this is a comical conjecture, which is primarily based on the theory that all Slytherins must be unified in supporting Voldemort and that Voldemort must have a soft-spot for his fellow Slytherin alumni.

Despite the negativity carried over into their stranger status because of their monstrous and godly otherness, Rowling uses the stranger in order to open a window into what it means to be an Other and to exemplify that fearing the Other is not necessary. Fear only fuels the fire to other the Slytherins even more, a lesson both Harry and readers have to learn. Rowling can't just tell readers to be open-minded about the Slytherins because there are just too many negative associations stacked against them, but she must, instead, slowly reveal that to be a Slytherin does *not* necessarily mean to be evil. We must try to understand the Slytherins more in order to understand the dynamic nature of the Other, to de-Other the Slytherins, and to humanize them.

How Slytherins Are Othered

The first thing that must be done in de-othering the Slytherins is to understand that otherness is created by those who do not wish to accept others who are different. At first glance, we could say that the Slytherins do the othering, making those who do not fulfill their requirements look foolish and ostracize them as if they are lacking in something—be it money or pure blood—but they are not the only bullies in Hogwarts. In Rowling's world, those who are of Slytherin

House are also those who are othered; quite often, they are treated and viewed differently from the rest of the students at Hogwarts. Much of this treatment comes from the forms of otherness that Slytherins fit into, as previously discussed, but there are also many characters, and many readers, who ostracize the Slytherins merely because *they are Slytherins*. This othering is primarily driven by a long history of prejudice built upon assumptions and generalizations about what it means to be a Slytherin. Because these stereotypes are accepted as fact, the Slytherins are often misjudged and mistreated, even by some of the noblest and fairest of Rowling's characters.

The desire to treat the Slytherins badly is introduced to Harry and readers early on in the series, stemming from the legacy of Slytherin House. In *Chamber of Secrets*, Professor Binns explains to his students that Hogwarts was founded by four wizards, one of whom, Salazar Slytherin, did not wish to admit wizards and witches of impure magical blood to the school (Rowling 150). From this story, the groundwork for negative associations was added to the legacy of Slytherin House; however, what actually occurred and how Salazar Slytherin is perceived have become things of conjecture and, ultimately, simplified to the detriment of the house's reputation. Author of "Is Ambition a Virtue? Why Slytherin Belongs at Hogwarts," Steven Patterson gives a comical perspective of how general readers and many of Rowling's characters must imagine how the discussion of creating Hogwarts occurred. In his scenario, Patterson first portrays the four founders as four friends wishing to educate and pass on the traits of

what each believed would make good wizards and witches, forming houses under each predominant trait that represented each founder. Then, Patterson gives a hypothetical conversation that is supposed to reveal the general ideals of each founder: Gryffindor wishes to promote leadership and fearlessness, Ravenclaw desires to instill intelligence above all, and Hufflepuff appreciates loyalty and goodness. When it comes to Slytherin's declaration of what he prizes most, Patterson plays on the consensus that Slytherin must wish to harbor the undesirables:

> Finally, all have gone except [the] last friend: the brooding, sometimes scary, but undeniably talented fellow with the dark, narrow eyes and well-groomed goatee. "What kind of students will your house foster?" all ask. He smiles thinly and replies in a throaty hiss, "Give me the evil ones from old families." (122)

Though comical, Patterson does not portray Slytherin as comical for no reason. Association to Slytherin House is continually referred to as something undesired over and over again throughout the series, whether it is in Ron's distaste at the possibility of being placed in Slytherin upon his arrival at Hogwarts (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone* 106), in Harry's description of the house as "stinking Slytherin" (218), or in the number of other times that the house is referred to as something unworthy or unwanted. What's lost in this demonized vision of Salazar Slytherin is the fact that he and the other three founders once "worked in harmony together" before Slytherin left Hogwarts because his pure-blood requirement

would not be accepted by the other three founders (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 150). Yes, Slytherin is detestable for his prejudices, but his ability to work with others for the betterment of society by educating the young discloses his humanity, revealing him as something more than just a flat villain as his legacy tends to portray him. Unfortunately, his humanity is forgotten, and the students of his house are burdened with the stigma that accompanies being his namesakes.

Also relatable to the generalization of Salazar Slytherin is the simplification of all Slytherin students—that ambition and cunning are undesirable traits. Upon the first sorting of newly arrived students at Hogwarts, the Sorting Hat reveals to the new students and readers that Slytherins are "cunning folk [who] use any means to achieve their ends," and in stating this, Slytherins are once again made out to be bad (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone* 118). Cunning, of course, reverberates back to the association of the Slytherins to the serpent of biblical myth, where Eve is "beguiled" by the "subtil"—often translated as "cunning"—creature (*The Holy Bible*, Gen. 3.13 and 3.1). Cunning is often not viewed as a positive descriptor and even less so when tied to the image of the serpent or snake. And as for ambition, the Slytherins sound as bad as cut-throat pirates, grave robbers, or some other derelicts bent on getting whatever they want no matter the price. Returning to Patterson's article, he makes the point that the ambition of Slytherins is supposed to be the fourth virtue at Hogwarts, just as bravery, intelligence, and loyalty are, as well (127). This idea of a "harmony" of virtues is not only suggested in the harmony of the four founders but also in Rowling's own

perceptions of the four houses:

> I wanted [the four houses] to correspond roughly to the four elements. So Gryffindor is fire, Ravenclaw is air, Hufflepuff is earth, and Slytherin is water.... So again, it was this idea of harmony and balance, that you had four necessary components and by integrating them you would make a very strong place. (Rowling, "*Mugglenet*")

Ambition is often thought of as a vice, though; those who are ambitious are also viewed as ruthless and never satisfied with what they have. However, Patterson, like Rowling, argues that ambition can be quite virtuous, using Gandhi's determined fight for India's freedom and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s unwavering drive for equal rights as prime examples (Patterson 129). Severus Snape is a perfect example of how ambition can be a virtue; his willingness to risk his own life to keep his word to Dumbledore and to Lily Potter's memory shows how ambition can work for the greater good. Slytherins are not the only ambitious characters in Rowling's books, either. Harry and Dumbledore are both ambitious characters, never giving up in their mission to destroy Voldemort, even when it means sacrificing their own lives for the greater good. However, these illustrations of ambition are overshadowed by the fact that Slytherins are supposed to be the ambitious ones, and with their ambition comes terror, destruction and death as are the results of Voldemort's ambitions.

It is because of the dislike caused by the Slytherins' legacy and their questionable virtue that they are repeatedly treated unfairly and demeaned, a lesson the newly sorted Slytherin, Draco Malfoy, learns during his first year at Hogwarts. Draco must first learn that fairness and playing by the rules has no place in Hogwarts. Upon entering the school, Harry and readers are informed that the Head of Slytherin House, Severus Snape, "always favors" students from his house, which at first seems to affirm suspicions that the Slytherins' ambition is more of a vice than a virtue (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone* 135); however, soon after that, Draco learns that favoritism is not only limited to the Head of his house. The rules are broken for Harry's benefit and the benefit of Gryffindor House when Minerva McGonagall, Head of Gryffindor, allows Harry, a first year, to have a broomstick when all other first year students are banned from having one. When Draco approaches a teacher about this, he is informed, "Yes, yes, that's right...Professor McGonagall told me all about the special circumstances" (165). The "special circumstances" are in fact the new-found Quidditch talent that Harry possesses and McGonagall's hope that Harry will help Gryffindor beat Slytherin in "the house championship for the first time in seven years" (216). Draco also learns from McGonagall that telling the truth will do him no good and that his word is untrustworthy. For example, after discovering Harry aiding Hagrid in breaking a law that prohibits owning a dragon, Draco is caught out of his dormitory at night by McGonagall. Draco's honesty and the seriousness of the situation, however, are called into question:

"You don't understand, Professor. Harry Potter's coming—he's got a dragon!"

"What utter rubbish! How dare you tell such lies! Come on—I shall see Professor Snape about you, Malfoy!" (240)

Not only is Malfoy punished in his attempt to catch a law-breaker, but his credibility is not merely questioned but labeled non-existent in the eyes of McGonagall. He tells lies, and that is all.

The most important instance, however, that reaffirms Draco's and all Slytherins' fates as the Other is in the blatant disregard for the achievements, hard work, and feelings of the Slytherins by one of the noblest characters in the *Harry Potter* series – Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts. At the final feast of the school year in *Sorcerer's Stone*, Slytherin House is celebrating its victory at having earned the most house points and winning the house championship when Dumbledore congratulates them but claims that "recent events must be taken into account" (305). Dumbledore goes on to award Harry, Ron, and Hermione points for their participation in stopping Voldemort from gaining the Sorcerer's Stone, which would have brought him back to his full health. These last-minute points only tie Gryffindor and Slytherin in house points, but instead of having the two houses share in the victory, Dumbledore tips the scales in favor of Gryffindor – his own house when he was a student, by the way – by awarding a final ten points to Neville Longbottom for his courage in taking a stand against his fellow Gryffindors. The joy at the Slytherins' loss and

humiliation is quite evident:

> Harry, still cheering, nudged Ron in the ribs and pointed at Malfoy, who couldn't have looked more stunned and horrified if he'd just had the Body-Bind curse put on him.
>
> "Which means," Dumbledore called over the storm of applause, for even Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were celebrating the downfall of Slytherin, "we need a little change of decorations." (306)

Of course, there's a certain level of satisfaction in having the hero succeed in winning the house cup, but at the embarrassment and belittlement of a quarter of Hogwarts' students is quite unfair and disrespectful. Dumbledore could have given the three heroes awards for special services to the school, as has been done in the past at Hogwarts, or at the very least given the points prior to the decorating of the dining hall in Slytherin's colors and banners; instead, he waited for an audience to witness both the success of the Gryffindors as well as the defeat and public humiliation of the Slytherins. Such meanness seems quite petty for someone of Dumbledore's reputation, but Dumbledore is, after all, a Gryffindor and Harry's mentor. Then again, it's not so surprising to see the minority of Hogwarts – as the other three houses join ranks against them and jointly celebrate Slytherins' demise – othered in this way. The lessons Draco must learn in his first year emphasize his status as Other, teaching him to expect such doubt and ill-treatment because he is a Slytherin.

With such ill treatment and ostracization by the majority of the student population and faculty, is it such a surprise, then, that the Slytherins turn out to be bullies? As the Sorting Hat tells the students before being sorted, "There's nothing hidden in your head the Sorting Hat can't see" (117), which suggests the Sorting Hat understands the thoughts and desires of each student, as is seen when the Hat notices Harry's "thirst to prove [him]self" (121). Due to the overwhelming support in the series that most Slytherins are petty, cruel, and the reigning bullies, it would seem that the Sorting Hat places malicious characters in Slytherin House based on what it detects within each student upon sorting. In short, if one has the inclination to be mean, he or she would fit best in Slytherin. However, I argue that it is their treatment as Other that drives many Slytherins to portray a bullyish nature for self-preservation and retaliation. Upon analyzing her research of othering amongst youth in Brazil's schools, Castro has come to the conclusion that hatred is a driving force in both the attempts to be rid of the Other and to find power as an Other:

> The symbolic annihilation of the other can be a solution to the felt menace and its vicissitudes. Hatred excludes, casting out to a distance what is not tolerated, turning it into abjection.... Hatred, contempt, disgust, repulsion are associated with being an other to others, or making others *the* other. Otherness runs, therefore, in both directions: being made (looked at, felt as if) an *other* by others, becoming the object of negative feelings; and regarding others as

> the incarnation of negativeness, thus, firmly separating otherness, putting it away.... Those others who are distanced, put away and despised, *look back*, reflecting *back* the hatred and the strangeness projected onto them. They become a source of constant uneasiness. Social order based on hatred is achieved through a rigid control of violent and disruptive behaviour, keeping under surveillance the maintenance of the status quo: demarcated territories and established positions must continue to be so. (484-5)

Rowling has said that all Slytherins are not necessarily bad, that to make them as such "would be too brutal for words" ("*Mugglenet*"), but by making them the Other, there is no escape from the monstrous associations and unsavory legacy for the newly sorted, eleven-year-old Slytherins. Their place is to be the Other, hated and unfairly treated, and they must hate and treat unfairly in return. The phrase "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" has great relevance in othering, but for the othered Slytherins, the reverse is true—"If you can't join 'em, beat 'em." Even without Rowling's claim that not all in Slytherin are bad, there is still little logic in suggesting that eleven-year-old children are, by nature, predisposed to become bullies, Death Eaters, murderers, and evil sociopaths.

It is, instead of their nature, how they are nurtured that makes Slytherins become such cruel characters. Take Dumbledore, for example. In *Deathly Hallows*, a lot is revealed about Dumbledore's character, including some things to tarnish his reputation as a selfless crusader for good. He is a very ambitious

character, both while he was a student at Hogwarts and throughout his adulthood, yet despite the good intentions behind his ambitious drive, Dumbledore let his ambitions become more important than the ethics behind them when he was young. Harry and readers are informed by both Dumbledore brothers that Albus strove for greatness no matter the consequences; Dumbledore admits to Harry, "I was gifted, I was brilliant. I wanted to shine. I wanted glory" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 715), and in order to achieve this, Dumbledore needed to ignore the atrocities that would pave the way to his glory:

> Grindelwald. You cannot imagine how his ideas caught me, Harry, inflamed me. Muggles forced into subservience. We wizards triumphant. Grindelwald and I, the glorious young leaders of the revolution. Oh, I had a few scruples. I assuaged my conscience with empty words. It would all be for the greater good, and any harm done would be repaid a hundredfold in benefits for wizards. Did I know, in my heart of hearts, what Gellert Grindelwald was? I think I did, but I closed my eyes. If the plans we were making came to fruition, all my dreams would come true. (716)

Dumbledore's ambition was, in general terms, to gain power, much like Voldemort's ambition to be the most powerful wizard—ruler of the world and cheater of death. Why is it, then, that Dumbledore did not become the monster Voldemort is? I argue that part of the reason is because of Voldemort's status as Other—being a Slytherin—and Dumbledore's status as Self/Same—being *not* a

Slytherin—which can help explain how the two came to different life paths. Being a Slytherin, a minority, an Other, Voldemort desired power more than Dumbledore because he had little to none offered to him as an Other. Dumbledore, not an Other, had many more opportunities for advancement, trust, and praise by his peers and mentors, who offered approval and, with it, chances for gaining power. Dumbledore is familiar with power and is frequently offered it in his life: Prefect and Head Boy at Hogwarts, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, multiple offers to be Minister of Magic, and eventually becoming Headmaster of Hogwarts, to name a few. However, he was able to identify that power corrupted him, whereas Voldemort never saw corruption as something to avoid. Voldemort would do anything to gain power because corruption only means that his actions are not approved of by the majority of the wizarding world, a concept Slytherins are all too-well familiar with; therefore, corruption means nothing to Voldemort who has always had little to no approval as an Other. If the sorting hat had sorted Dumbledore into Slytherin rather than Gryffindor because of his ambitious nature, would he have been averse to the idea of taking lives for "the greater good?" If his achievements were as flippantly disregarded as the Slytherins' are—such as when winning the House Cup at the end of *Sorcerer's Stone* is stolen from them—would Dumbledore have been more apt to strive for power no matter the consequences? Slytherins, obviously, are not the only characters to disregard the rights of muggles and carry prejudices towards non-pureblood wizards and witches, as is shown in Dumbledore's disregard for them when planning with

Grindelwald, so who's to say Dumbledore wouldn't have become a monster like Voldemort or a number of other Slytherins whose otherness taught them that they are less worthy than everyone else?

In postulating this reversed scenario, though, in no way am I saying that, if given the opportunities or positive reinforcement, Voldemort would have turned out to be a better human being. He has many more complex problems that aided in creating who he became, but in regards to the rest of the Slytherin population, they may have turned out differently if given half the chance. The Slytherins may bully and be mean, but won't a dog bite back if it has been kicked enough times? It takes a greater amount of strength and determination to fight that urge than submit to the wave of negativity crashing onto one's shoulders as an Other. The othering of the Slytherins is a large obstacle to overcome along their journey of growing up, but surprisingly, quite a few manage it. It is this few who Rowling uses to attempt to redeem Slytherin House and, along the way, change how Harry and readers think about the Other.

De-Othering the Slytherins

The forms of monster and god help to reinforce the fears placed on the Other, that otherness is bad and when in power can create mayhem and destruction. By setting up her Slytherins as these forms of Other, Rowling draws in readers with comfortable, familiar villains. We can recognize the flat archetype of the bad guy in these two forms of otherness; however, in order to alter

readers' perceptions of the Other, Rowling also makes them the stranger. In doing this, she enables the Slytherins to become dynamic characters, villains capable of change, villains who become heroes. When the Other becomes less strange, we—the Self/Same—can begin to identify with and understand the Other better, potentially leading to an altered view that the Other is more like ourselves than first thought. Kearney explains that "one of the best ways to *de-alienate* the other is to recognize (a) oneself as another and (b) the other as (in part) another self," which allows for the mutual respect of both the Self and the Other as beings deserving of "rights and responsibilities" (80). Though many are blinded to the injustices inflicted on the Slytherins because of general dislike of them and, no doubt, their bullying ways, Rowling is still able to de-other her villains by slowly uncovering their not-so-villainous natures as the war of the wizarding world builds to its climax. Heroism, though flawed and often gone astray at first, is a dominant trait in several Slytherins, though it is often overlooked and underappreciated by both readers and characters alike, especially when compared to Harry's unwavering desire to always do the "right" thing. There are four particular Slytherins who are noteworthy of heroism and who are vital participants in the destruction of Voldemort and his murderous reign: Severus Snape, Horace Slughorn, Regulus Black, and Draco Malfoy.

Snape is the more obvious example of a Slytherin becoming a hero. In *Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore, in speaking with Snape, exclaims, "I sometimes think we sort too soon" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 680), suggesting that Snape's

bravery may have been better suited in Gryffindor if he had the chance to be re-sorted once he found his courage. Never mind that Dumbledore's words also suggest that Slytherins are not brave, Snape is very nearly the hero that Harry is. The only difference is that Harry is always good while Snape has made bad choices in his past and harbors a somewhat unlovable personality. He is cruel and mean to most people who are not in Slytherin House—reflective of the retaliatory stance an Other may take as a result of being othered—and his deep-seeded though misguided hate for Harry does not help characters and readers to dislike him any less. Yet, Snape is much more like the hero he despises than he may like to admit; however, Snape's heroism is somewhat diminished in the face of Harry's radiance. Consider when Harry willingly marches into the Forbidden Forest to face Voldemort and his own death; the reader is both awed and satisfied in Harry's actions. He's the hero and a Gryffindor, so his bravery and self-sacrifice are applauded and expected. Yet, do characters and readers give the same consideration to Snape, who sacrifices his own life for the greater good, as Harry does? Snape's aiding of Harry and spying for the Order, remaining close to Voldemort while putting his own life in danger, is a heroic act worthy of Harry Potter. Snape dies in performing the duties given to him by Dumbledore and in doing what's right, but his death is not given as much consideration as Harry's triumph. The only recognition given to him is by Harry, when he names his youngest son Albus Severus in remembrance and honor of "probably the bravest man [he] ever knew" (758).

It is the revelation of Snape's love for Harry's mother and how much he is willing to sacrifice in payment or punishment for his part in her death that pulls Snape out of the crowd of the strange Others. In his discussion on Snape's morality, Patterson explains that the lesson we learn about Snape "is an important one—people are not always what they seem, morally, to be, and sometimes people are unfairly judged by their demeanor rather than by their moral character" (128). This particular lesson is what Rowling teaches her characters and readers and what "de-alienates" the Slytherins. They become more complex and less one-dimensional when their humanity is uncovered. For Snape, Slughorn, Regulus, and Draco, this peeling away of layers to reveal the man, not the monster, is how Rowling attempts to de-other the Other.

Slughorn is a bit of an oddity in the Slytherin group readers are aware of because he, out of most of them, has not done monstrous things. He, unlike nearly all of his fellow alumni, never really does anything that can be construed as bad or evil. He does slip up in revealing information that leads to Voldemort's immortality, but it is in no way intentional, unlike many of his fellow Slytherins' actions. Slughorn is still somewhat unlikeable, if not in his part in aiding Voldemort's rise to power than because of his selfishness and superficiality. He is an ambitious man, though not for power. He enjoys the benefits his connections bring him and takes pleasure in claiming credit in discovering many prominent, successful, and famous wizards and witches. He, also, makes his own safety his highest concern, only deeming to attend Hogwarts because it is

the safest place due to Dumbledore's presence and, therefore, protection. However, he is still a hero, though not in such a grand way as Snape, because of his willingness to sacrifice his own well-being for the greater good. His first redeeming act is in his choice to reveal his actual conversation with Voldemort about horcruxes. This small act is what puts Dumbledore and Harry on the right path to stopping Voldemort. Though it may seem like nothing, in fact, Slughorn's actions in revealing the truth puts his life in grave danger, something a truly selfish person would never do. Slughorn's second redemption is when he stays to fight at Hogwarts in the final battle, again putting his own life in danger...a very selfless thing indeed. By doing this, he shows, as McGonagall demands of him and all of the Slytherins, where his loyalties lie (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 602), which are with Dumbledore, Harry, Hogwarts, and the rest of the wizarding world that is fighting for peace.

One of the first selfless acts of a Slytherin, though, in attempts to thwart Voldemort's plans was performed by one of the Dark Lord's young recruits—Regulus Black, brother of Sirius. According to Sirius, Regulus was a young supporter of Voldemort who was disillusioned with the powerful wizard once he realized what being a Death Eater entailed. Part or all of this disillusionment came from Voldemort's secrecy and attempted murder of Regulus's house elf, Kreacher. According to Kreacher, Regulus stole one of Voldemort's horcruxes, a locket, in order to destroy it and died soon after. Before he died, though, he ordered Kreacher to destroy the locket and tell no one of what became of him.

Hermione explains Regulus's strange actions, saying, "Kreacher and Regulus's family were all safer if they kept to the old pure-blood line. Regulus was trying to protect them all" (198). So, long before Harry decides to die in order to destroy the horcrux within him, Regulus Black—a Slytherin—forfeits his life by taking the horcrux locket and replacing it with a fake, all in hope that his actions will help those who come after him in defeating Voldemort. Though it may be of little mention after giving up his life for the greater good, what's also admirable about Regulus are the motives for his actions. He took measures to not only protect his family but also Kreacher, a slave to his family. Regulus's family has been known to treat house elves like property, mounting their heads on the walls of the house like prized game. The fact that Regulus grew angry at Voldemort's disregard for Kreacher's life and the fact that Regulus drinks the potion to get the locket, not forcing Kreacher to drink it like Voldemort did, gives a great deal of humanity to Regulus. His actions are those of a noble hero, and after hearing Kreacher's tale, that is precisely what Rowling wants her heroic trio and readers to understand. Regulus is not the only Slytherin youth to be disillusioned by Voldemort, though, and he is not the only one who fought to protect his family and the innocent.

Probably the most controversial and somewhat misunderstood Slytherin character, even more so than Snape, is Draco Malfoy. Though much like Regulus and Snape, Draco has had to learn a hard lesson about the choices he makes. Like many before him, Draco is heartlessly prejudice against non-purebloods, a typical Slytherin bully, and a naïve supporter of Voldemort; that is

until, like Snape and Regulus, Draco is confronted with the reality of Voldemort's sociopathic mind and sadistic demands. Many critics and general readers think of Draco as a reflection of the stereotypical Slytherin—obnoxious and cowardly—and some even place him on the level of evil. The critic Connie Neal does such, repeatedly claiming that Harry either avoids or triumphs over evil by his aversion to or defeat of Draco (29, 219). Even Rowling has admitted that Draco is so flawed that, when fans have expressed their affections for him in the past, she confessed, "That's the only time when it stopped amusing me and started almost worrying me...Draco...is not a nice man" ("*Mugglenet*"). And for most of the series, Draco really embodies the flat archetypal villain who can always be counted on to provide plenty of turmoil and mayhem for the hero.

However, by the end of the *Harry Potter* series, I argue that Draco, in fact, is revealed to be a hero himself. He is neither a flawless hero like Harry nor a life-sacrificing hero like Snape or Regulus, but Draco finds his heroism when it is needed most in order to save others. Beginning in *Half-Blood Prince*, Draco appears to be falling into the same pattern like many others before him by blindly following and supporting Voldemort. He is even branded with a Dark Mark, the sign of his allegiance to the Dark Lord, but Rowling slowly begins to reveal Draco's humanity, first seen when Harry discovers Draco in a girls' bathroom talking with Moaning Myrtle, the lavatory's resident ghost:

> "No one can help me," said Malfoy. His whole body was shaking. "I can't do it....I can't....It won't work...and unless I do it

soon...he says he'll kill me...."

And Harry realized, with a shock so huge it seemed to root him to the spot, that Malfoy was crying—actually crying—tears streaming down his pale face into the grimy basin. (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 522)

At this point, this is the first time, both for Harry and readers, that Draco is portrayed in a human fashion—vulnerable and desperate. Draco's no longer filled with that arrogance and bravado we usually see, meaning he is becoming a more complex character by becoming pitiable. His reasoning behind doing Voldemort's bidding seems quite selfish—to save his own life—until later in the book when we discover he must do what Voldemort demands of him, or "he'll kill me! He'll kill my whole family!" (591). It is this last excuse that begins to show Draco's true loyalties and sacrificial nature. He is not aiding Voldemort out of support or devotion, but instead, he is willing to give up his innocence, to "spill blood" per se, by killing Dumbledore in order to save his family. What's even more suggestive of Draco's heroism is, despite the very real probability of losing his own life and those of his parents, Draco chooses not to take a life. He does the "right thing," something he hasn't chosen to do throughout most of *Harry Potter* up until this moment. Though Draco's lack of action is not particularly brave when compared to other heroes like Harry or even Snape, he still attempts to do what's right and even tries to save lives by the time he resurfaces later in the plot.

Much of Draco's heroism is not shown in what he *does* but, instead, in what he *does not* do. His inaction brings humanity to his character and, ultimately, aids in the success of Voldemort's defeat. The first example of this is when Harry (in disguise), Hermione, and Ron are taken to Draco's family estate upon capture by the Snatchers. Draco is asked to identify the trio by his father who wants to be absolutely sure they have caught Harry Potter before summoning Voldemort, but Draco is reluctant and avoids giving any definite answer:

> "There's something there," he whispered, "it could be the scar, stretched tight....Draco, come here, look properly! What do you think?"
>
> Harry saw Draco's face up close now, right beside his father's. They were extraordinarily alike, except that while his father looked beside himself with excitement, Draco's expression was full of reluctance, even fear.
>
> "I don't know," he said, and he walked away toward the fireplace where his mother stood watching. [....]
>
> "Look, Draco, isn't it the Granger girl?"
>
> "I...maybe...yeah." [....]
>
> "Draco, look at him, isn't it Arthur Weasley's son, what's his name—?"
>
> "Yeah," said Draco again, his back to the prisoners. "It could

be." (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 458-9)

Draco is obviously in a predicament between doing what his father requests by dooming his classmates and doing what he can to help save them. With an audience of Death Eaters hanging on his every word and gesture, there is little Draco can do without revealing his desire to do what's right, which would doom him. The little he is able to do by not identifying the three heroes not only speaks volumes of Draco's true intentions, but it also aids the three captives by giving them more time to figure out a plan and, eventually, escape. After witnessing Draco's unease and sickly demeanor during the torture and murder of Hogwarts' Muggle Studies teacher at the beginning of *Deathly Hallows*, it is no surprise to witness Draco's lack of enthusiasm in watching the same happen to his three classmates (3-12).

One of the more revealing though controversial incidents of Draco's true intentions towards goodness is during the final battle at Hogwarts when he meets Harry in the Room of Requirement. The conversation between Draco and Crabbe, another son of a Death Eater, and the actions that ensue push Draco to participate in order to do what's right. Like before, Draco has no desire to see Harry get hurt, so he yells for Crabbe to stop when attempting the Cruciatus Curse on Harry. He even tries to restrain Crabbe's arm to hinder his intentions. What is most intriguing and puzzling about the scene, though, is Draco's interest in the diadem. Unthinkingly, it may seem at first that Draco is on a mission for Voldemort to discover what Harry is after, but as is revealed later, Voldemort

knows nothing of Draco's intentions when he unsympathetically tells Lucius Malfoy, "If your son is dead, Lucius, it is not my fault. He did not come and join me, like the rest of the Slytherins" after McGonagall evacuated most of the school (641). Draco is acting alone and on an assumption that Harry is on a mission to stop Voldemort, which involves the diadem. After considering Draco's previous insubordinations, there is little reason to believe that Draco is attempting to help Voldemort any further. Though his interest in the diadem is never explained by Rowling, it could be argued that he, in fact, is attempting to aid in the destruction of Voldemort, having gleaned some knowledge about the diadem's importance as Regulus Black once did with the locket-horcrux. However, even not knowing the reason behind Draco's interest in the diadem, Draco plainly wishes no ill-will on Harry, shouting, "Don't kill him! DON'T KILL HIM!" when Crabbe and Goyle aim their wands at Harry (631), and it being clear that Draco is not acting on Voldemort's commands, it is plausible that he is fighting to destroy Voldemort if for no other reason than to save his captive family.

After Rowling takes the time to show the humanity in her strange Others, there begins to be a glimmer of hope for the de-othering of the Slytherins in the epilogue of *Deathly Hallows*. This hope comes from the explanation Harry gives to his youngest son, Albus Severus, who is about to enter the world of Hogwarts for the first time and is afraid of being sorted into Slytherin House:

"You were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew."

"But *just say*—"

"—then Slytherin House will have gained an excellent student, won't it? It doesn't matter to us, Al." (758).

Having held such prejudice against Slytherin House when he was in school, it is an enormous achievement for Harry to be so open-minded, and a lot of that openness comes from the chances Harry had to understand some of the Slytherins and realize their humanity, particularly Snape's. This is Rowling's chance to give hope to the Slytherins who come after, to the little eleven-year-olds who are to become the Other because without the opportunity for change and the chance to have unity amongst the Hogwarts houses, what is to stop another child from growing into the monstrous role of the Other as Voldemort and many other Slytherins had?

The unification of the houses is very vital to the Slytherins' freedom from otherness, but the hope Rowling suggests of this happening appears to be only a passing fancy of hers. In an interview, Rowling addresses the likelihood of Slytherin House becoming more unified with the rest of the school; a fan asks if the "house divisions [are] as prevalent in Harry's childrens' Hogwarts as in the previous generations," and Rowling explains that "Slytherin has become diluted. It is no longer the pureblood bastion it once was. Nevertheless, its dark

reputation lingers, hence Albus Potter's fears" ("Webchat"). Rowling's choice of words here is interesting; she does not overtly answer whether or not the house divisions have lessened but, instead, side-steps the question by commenting on the pure-blood lines of Slytherin House, something far-removed from the topic of house-unification. Though minor in the grand scale of her interview, this lack of hope for the Slytherin characters' chances at integrating into the non-Other majority of the school reveals Rowling's own limitations towards de-othering these characters.

Finding Hope for Slytherin Otherness

Rowling's judgment of her young characters, like Draco, really takes away any hope for the Slytherins to become something different or better; however, Dumbledore's regret that sorting was never allowed to be redone at a later age suggests more of a realistic view of developing youths. For example, though Draco often seems to be on the path of destruction and evil through most of the books, he doesn't seem to follow through with it and, to reflect his maturity and learning from past mistakes, begins to act with more of a conscience as he matures. As an othered character, he develops a much more realistic persona due to his flaws and the fact that he must deal with temptation and pay for past mistakes in order to improve and develop. However, a lot of what Draco achieves as a developing character is only limited to Rowling's abilities to humanize the Slytherins for readers, and the lack of school unification by the end of the series

does not allow for this. To be illustrated in the next chapter, the lack of de-othering and integration of the Slytherins into the unified school Rowling envisioned in creating the four houses has become a concern in the fan world, and fans have taken it upon themselves to humanize the Slytherins by embracing and glorifying their otherness, trying to show how we *all* are Others—be them monstrous, strange, or worshipful—and Draco is often in the spotlight of fans in such attempts. The questionable character of Draco by the end of the series has inspired many fans to find the humanity and dynamic nature of Draco to succeed in de-othering the Slytherins in some manner, picking up where Rowling left off and achieving what she failed to do.

CHAPTER THREE

RECLAIMING OF THE SLYTHERINS BY THE FANS

> It may well be that we find more of ourselves than we lose in befriending those monsters that are ultimately neither *friend* nor foe, embracing the strangers in ourselves and others. For such mindfulness brings peace and transfigures fear.
>
> Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*

The view of the Other that Richard Kearney suggests is often difficult to achieve, especially in children who often view the world as black and white though adults, too, can often be guilty of the same polar viewpoint. As Rowling's world is told from a child's perspective but through Rowling's adult mind, there is often a disconnect between maintaining the black/white child-like view of the world and adapting that view to shades of gray; however, as previously discussed, Rowling is not fully able to achieve an open mindedness when it comes to her Slytherin Others, keeping them in a state of continued strangeness and villainy by the conclusion of the series. In order for these characters to gain some understanding and roundness to such flat characterization, readers must delve into the world of fandom, where to be a Slytherin is not something to be ashamed of or feared. In fact, fandom has allowed the Slytherins, both characters of Rowling's creation and Slytherin fans from around the world, a

voice and an identity as something more and something relatable than what's attributed with the term *Other*.

Fandom, especially in the form of fan-created work (e.g. prose and artwork), enables not only a way for fans to satisfy their own trivial desires that are not fulfilled within the canon of an original work, but as fan theorists suggest, it can also project and comment on current social mores, truths, and temperaments on various issues. In the introduction to their anthology *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, editors Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington explain how the study of fandom is important because it "represent[s] and champion[s] those disadvantaged within society," the fans often connecting in some way with those who are subjugated, ostracized, or "disempowered" (2). And with a modern society that is connected to media in a continual and affecting manner, understanding fandom and what occurs within it can shed light on human identity:

> The often cited "battles over hearts and minds" by which elections are won, and by which individuals' behavior towards their health or the environment is changed, or millions decide to turn to the streets in protest against war, racism, or poverty—all do not solely depend on rational discourses but on the ability to present a cause or public figure in which we, as readers, can find ourselves and to which we emotionally relate....Perhaps the most important contribution of contemporary research into fan audiences thus lies in furthering our

> understanding of how we form emotional bonds with ourselves and others in a modern, mediated world. (10)

Many fans have bonded over the Slytherin characters for a variety of reasons, but as is illustrated in much fandom work, fandom is often manufactured to create new facets of familiar characters, places, and events or to relate to an original canon in ways that are not possible with the original work's printed confines. However, some theorists think fans relating to a text can be unhealthy when fandom involves morally corrupt characters.

In their article "The Lure of Evil: Exploring Moral Formation on the Dark Side of Literature and the Arts," David Carr and Robert Davis express their concerns with the psychology behind fans who attempt to understand or relate to evil characters, as many could accuse Slytherin fans of doing:

> It is easy to see how a "sympathetic" exploration of bad, lax or weak character—particularly perhaps of the "extenuating" causes and circumstances of such character—might lead us to be more morally exculpatory or indulgent of our own weaknesses (for, after all, "they're only human nature"). In short, the danger of such artistic and aesthetic "cognitivism" is that the psychological and other worlds into which it affords us entry may be morally unsettling in a wide variety of less than positive ways. (99-100)

Carr and Davis go on to explain how this corruption of morals can be observed in the popularity of morally deviant characters in media; "violent and cruel disregard

for the interests of others heralds a new ethic of heroic authenticity [...,which] seems to be a marked feature of much of the popular (musical, sporting and other) culture—of self-actualising and amoral celebrity—to which young people today are widely drawn," which, in turn, can glamorize "moral skepticism and nihilism" (101, 103). There is no doubt that popularization of morally corrupt celebrities is evident in much of the media—for example, just look at people like Snookie from *Jerseylicious*, Paris Hilton, or reality show participants, all who seem to have little to no moral fiber and are instead shot into celebrity ranking because of their snobby, rude, and often uncaring personalities—but Slytherin fans are trying to alter the identity of these characters as "evil" and quash such polarity in morality.

What the fans do with the Slytherins, especially Draco, is not *only* to revel in the amoral acts—for to lose conscience and live out fantasies is tempting to *Harry Potter* fans, too—but also to relate that loss of conscience is something that is in all of us, not just those who fulfill a stereotypically evil role as is often present in much of literature. Evil is in all of us, and fans know this, and by knowing this, they also make the next logical connection; if evil is in all of us, then the Other and the Self are alike. The fans take that logical step and apply it to the Slytherins, not only accepting the bad but revealing the good, too, and illustrating the fully-developed human behind the Other. By doing this, Slytherin fans are rewriting the Other, fulfilling Kearney's vision of how the Other should be treated; "an ethics of otherness is not a matter of black and white, but of grey and grey.

This is no call for relativism. On the contrary, it is an invitation to judge more judiciously so that we may, wherever possible, judge more justly" (82). Despite all Slytherins needing to be given the benefit of the doubt, one of the most popular Slytherin characters who is rewritten in fandom in order to give him justice, so to speak, is Draco Malfoy. By giving Draco a more dynamic and well-rounded personality, many fans are able to relate the Other to themselves, bridging that gap between Self and Other. In fandom, Draco is often the lead character to come back from otherness, but his character is most multi-dimensional when viewing his fully-human persona through the popular wrock (wizard rock) band Draco and the Malfoys. Because of this fan-created band, Draco's character is able to reach a fully-developed and well-rounded personality not achievable in either the *Harry Potter* canon or most other fandom.

Fans' Desires to Rewrite the Slytherins

Many fans of the series have latched onto the impression that the Slytherin characters aren't given fair treatment or are limited in many ways. Because of this, many fans have taken it upon themselves to develop these characters further in various forms of fan fiction. This desire to extend the characters outside of Rowling's own work develops from curiosity and, in some cases, a need as the authors of "Writing Harry's World: Children Co-authoring Hogwarts" explain in their discussion of fandom theory. They point out that many fans create fan fiction in order to externalize their curiosity "about character

motivations and background, or what would have happened if the plot had moved in a different direction," but a lot of the draw for fan fiction is the opportunity for the fans "to appropriate the story and its character for their own purposes, filling in the narrative gaps they find according to their personal preferences for character relationships and plot" (Bond and Michelson 311). They continue to explain that often fans who feel "marginalized in their society" use fan fiction as a way to represent themselves within the work, providing a place "for social comment or criticism" (315). The idea of Slytherins as the Other presents great opportunities for fans who feel othered to step, theoretically, into Slytherin shoes and develop full personalities and fully-formed human lives for a quarter of Hogwarts' alumni.

In her essay "'I sometimes think we sort too soon': Rehumanizing the Slytherins: How Fandom Gave Humanity Back to the Slytherins," Stephanie Lalonde analyzes not only how fans have rewritten Slytherins but, also, why fans find such a need to do so:

> The stereotyping in the wizarding world based on house affiliation can be hugely debilitating to a person's future success and friendships, and whether the individuals fit the stigma or not, it will remain with them through their entire adult lives. However, fandom for the *Harry Potter* series often takes a different viewpoint. The series' following is not content with watching the adventure through the bias of one character, and seeks to examine what happens to

> the plot when another viewpoint is introduced, a viewpoint from the marginalized fringe. Those characters marginalized in the canon text receive fairer representation via fandom. (Lalonde)

Lalonde explains how much of the canon allows for very little positivity in relation to the majority of the Slytherins, and even when there is the few-and-far-between instances where a Slytherin is portrayed in a positive light, such actions are deemed flawed or, such as in the case of Snape, identified as uncharacteristic. When Snape illustrates his bravery in front of Dumbledore, Lalonde explains that Dumbledore's response of "You know, I sometimes think we Sort too soon" suggests that Snape's bravery proves him to not be a Slytherin; however, Lalonde feels that this stereotyping of the characters according to house attributes reinforces the idea that "acting against type is shown to be an accident instead of character growth." The simplification of the characters into the designated identifiers of each house has caught the attention of fans who feel such stereotyping is generic and unjust and that the Slytherin "qualities of cunning and ambition" should be viewed as good things (Lalonde).

With fans identifying themselves as the Other and relating to the otherness of Rowling's Slytherins, any instance of unwarranted ill-treatment, disregard, stereotyping, or neglect experienced by these characters in the books could be said to be felt by those who regard them as familiars. The easily accessible and empowering way for these fans to speak up for their fictional othered selves is in fandom where identity can be found and rewritten according

to Bond and Michelson; "ways of seeing self and the world are co-constructed as people insert themselves and others into various storylines. Lived experience conditions and informs a person's inscription of self into the fictions encountered" (Bond and Michelson 324). By rewriting the characters and stories of Rowling's creation, othered fans can create justice and voices for themselves by giving these same things to the Slytherins.

Fandom: Identities of the Other

The scope of *Harry Potter* fandom—*fandom* representing fan-created works, not the consumerism of *Harry Potter* memorabilia or the expression of being a fan of *Harry Potter*—is not only enormous but so diverse in medium. *Harry Potter* fans have invested so much into their creations of drawings, paintings, poetry, short stories, novellas and novels, films, music, and even full-length musicals, but what's also amazing is the amount of fans that has developed from these. Anyone delving into *Harry Potter* fan fiction would be immediately told by the fandom community to read *The Draco Trilogy* by Cassandra Claire, "three novel-length stories forming a trilogy about Draco Malfoy in which he's a twisted but redemptive soul, more sardonic than sadistic. Before *Order of the Phoenix* one couldn't enter fandom without being told they had to read the Draco series!" (Anelli 213). If looking for video entertainment, there's always the hilarious Potter Puppet Pals channel on *YouTube*, created by Neil Cicierega; fans can watch short videos of a child-like, though adult-themed,

puppet show involving an ego-centric Harry, a naive Ron, a depressed and brooding Snape, a senseless and often nude Dumbledore, and many other of Rowling's characters. Or to be really amazed by the genius and popularity of some fandom, one only needs to check out the StarKid Productions! channel on *YouTube* where a group of college students has written, directed, scored, and performed in two full-length *Harry Potter* musicals—*A Very Potter Musical* and *A Very Potter Sequel*—amongst many other musicals with plans for a third *Harry Potter*-themed musical in the works. This group has managed to accumulate such a following that they not only tour the nation performing their skits, doing meet-and-greets and Q&A's, and attending as special guests/performers at *Harry Potter* conventions, but they have managed to accumulate over 120,000,000 views and nearly 250,000 subscribers to their channel as of June 2012 (StarKidPotter). Despite Rowling's series having been completed years ago and the film franchise having executed its last *Harry Potter* movie, the fans continue to create fandom and become fans of the fandom as much as they are of the original canon. This enthusiasm for fandom itself had become so momentous at one point that it was able to create an entirely new genre of music—wizard rock.

Wizard rock, often referred to as "wrock" amongst the fans, began with fans who identified themselves with characters, some human and some not, from Rowling's magical world. Melissa Anelli—author of *Harry, a History: The True Story of a Boy Wizard, His Fans, and Life Inside the Harry Potter Phenomenon*, journalist, and fan-interviewer often requested by Rowling—details in her book

how wrock began with two brothers from Norwood, Massachusetts, who started the phenomenon when they decided to emulate themselves as Harry Potter and sing songs about their years at Hogwarts (104). Calling themselves Harry and the Potters, Paul and Joe DeGeorge started playing shows at birthday parties and small gatherings, eventually moving into playing at libraries and at Harry Potter conferences like LeakyCon, and finally playing tours around the nation and participating in massive wrock shows such as Wrockstock and the annual Yule Ball held every Christmas on the east coast. The popularity of this Harry-themed band eventually influenced many other fans to create their own bands which lead to the creation of the new musical genre:

> Hundreds of spin-off bands would give themselves names like The Butterbeer Experience and Justin Finch-Fletchley & the Sugar Quills, claim the DeGeorges as inspiration, and incorporate their do-it-yourself spirit and Harry-centric creativity into a blossoming new music genre that Paul and Joe called "wizard rock." (Anelli 105)

A lot of fans of the books discovered wrock through word of mouth and the Harry and the Potters fame amongst Rowling's fans, but the internet certainly helped spread the word of this group and the genre in general as it has done for much of *Harry Potter* fandom:

> Within five months of putting up their MySpace, they had five thousand friends. In a year, it was more than thirty thousand. In

> another year, they would be well above the eighty thousand mark. Those numbers are representative of a much larger underlying fan base, and one for which any "legit" band would kill. They were one of the biggest success stories of the MySpace heyday, and their strong identification with the main themes of the books made them naturally attractive to anyone who liked Harry Potter. (Anelli 126)

This "identification" that Anelli writes of has given Harry and the Potters and many of the other wrock bands an identity tied not only to the books but to the Other.

Though perhaps they are most well-known for this though they are not the only band who has done so, the DeGeorge brothers emulate the character they portray on stage and off, which often seems to reinforce an othered perspective. Right from the beginning of the band's stardom, the DeGeorges bristled at exploitation and capitalism that came with becoming famous. In an interview, the brothers recounted that once they had been asked to be in a sexually charged photo shoot for a bar that was near the Borders they were going to perform at. They rejected the offer, Paul stating, "*Ew*, no way...Why would Harry Potter appear in an ad for a bar for some stupid publicity photo?" (Anelli 116). Anelli interprets this harsh reaction and identification with Harry as a sign of the brothers' rejection of conformity and relating to an Other persona:

> They hadn't even played for a real crowd yet and already had an offer to use Harry Potter's icon status to do what they considered to

> be selling out. An ethos emerged. Their strong adverse reaction was fueled by their identity with Harry Potter. Harry Potter would never pose with sexy girls for publicity. Harry Potter would never play a show that kids couldn't get into, to help sell alcohol. Harry Potter would never sign with Live Nation. Harry Potter would never milk their listeners and fans for overpriced merchandise or albums. Harry Potter would fight the dark forces of evil and the record industry establishment as if they were one. Harry Potter became an invisible partner to Harry and the Potters, whose moral choices would abet and guide their own as they tried to carve a niche just left of the music industry. (Anelli 116)

This fight appeared in various ways for Harry and the Potters, such as in their battle against Warner Brothers, threatening them with copyright infringement (Anelli 121-122), and in their preferred choice of locale for wrocking—often in libraries where, as Anelli puts it, "It was yet another slight dig at 'the man' to be turning up the volume intentionally in a place that wanted you to quiet your speech" (126). This identification with being the little guy, the one fighting for what's right or challenging normative is something many wrock bands have embraced.

There's a lot of focus in wrock on the characters not often highlighted in the *Harry Potter* books. Other than the few bands who have named themselves after the few leading characters—Harry and the Potters, Dumbledore's Army,

The Hermione Crookshanks Experience, Ron and the Weasleys , and the like—many of the bands created identities around minor characters and even creatures that are often overshadowed by the main storylines and lead characters in the novels, such as The Cedric Diggorys, Creevey Crisis, The Fleur Delacours, Ginny and the Heartbreakers, The Whomping Willows, The Moaning Myrtles, and Thomas and Finnigan. There's a great deal of emphasis on minor characters, too, as seen in Ginny and the Heartbreakers' adeptly named song "Ode to the Minor Characters," beginning with "I used to be like you / Just mentioned in a sentence or two / I feel your pain" and ending with a repetition of "You're minor" through to the end of the song. Much of the music is fun, silly, and comical, but there are also many songs in wrock that give voice to those who are overlooked or treated unjustly, especially when it comes to Slytherins.

Besides the many bands that embody lead characters or friends and family of lead characters, there are also a surprisingly large amount of bands who have embodied various Slytherin characters or things related to Slytherin House: The Basilisk in Your Pasta, Lord Voldi and the Darkmarks, The Parselmouths, Professor Snivellus, The Purebloods, RiddleTM, Tom Riddle and Friends, and Voldemort – Wizard Metal to name a few. It is near impossible to skim through any of the albums by these Slytherin bands without running into songs regarding both the joys and heartaches of being a Slytherin, from a tongue-in-cheek song about how great it is to be mean and scare first years in the hallways—The Parselmouths' "Being in Slytherin is Not Half Bad"—to the

dark bitterness of Snape who can't let go of the bullying he suffered by the hands of Harry's father—The Sectumsempras' "Hate Remains"—to a Voldemort who thinks his pureblood view of the world is genuinely a good thing—The Mudbloods' "Voldemort; A Love Song." Often, though, these bands either try to reinforce the stereotypical "evil" Slytherin characterization or completely ignore canon and make many of the immoral Slytherins misunderstood or genuinely good, as in changing Voldemort's character. Not often do the bands manage to rewrite Slytherin characters true to canon while delving into the possibilities of character development, but one band has succeeded in fully rewriting the otherness in a Slytherin character by tackling one of the most controversial characters in Rowling's books and a great representative of the Other—Draco Malfoy.

Rewriting the Other: Draco and the Malfoys

In a lot of popular fan fiction, Draco's character is rarely ever the stereotypical Slytherin Rowling has created for her readers. More often than not, Draco becomes an entirely different character, often caring, funny, or one of the good guys who works with Harry, Hermione, and Ron to save the day. However, much fandom leaves behind Draco's canonical traits or attempts to cover them up by passing off his inappropriate or dangerous behavior as a sign of his naiveté or simply a misunderstanding on the part of others. His character is frequently developed in one of two ways: his otherness is abandoned so he can become

one of the Same—a hero or participant in the heroic trio's successes—or he remains the other in his stereotypical Slytherin state. In order for his character to truly be fully-developed, he must remain as an Other but also be accessible to the Same. The band Draco and the Malfoys—one of the most popular wrock bands, perhaps second only to Harry and the Potters—has managed to do this by keeping Draco's textual self intact, while showing his humanity, too, and giving Draco a full-range of human emotions and capabilities that he hasn't had before. Not only is he the Other, but he's the Same who embraces his otherness as something that he shares with all people—both the good and the bad. The Other, as Kearney has explained it, is often viewed as something separate from the Self, but in Draco's case, his otherness presents fans with the opportunity to see themselves in his mistakes, fears, loves, and rage. Rowling's Draco brings all of these facets of Draco to light in her series, but Draco and the Malfoys are able to de-other Draco in making him human while reveling in the things that make him Other, those not-so-great things we sometimes don't wish to acknowledge in ourselves but readily point out in others. Bradley Mehlenbacher and Brian Ross (founders of Draco and the Malfoys) have managed to create a multifaceted Draco through their songs, and unlike so much fan fiction that is limited to one interpretation of a character due to the need for consistency in plot, each song in each album is able to portray Draco in true canonical fashion or in new dynamic ways, giving him a true roundness to his personality all done with a touch of humor.

Mehlenbacher and Ross never veer far from Draco's often cruel, selfish, pompous, and egocentric nature. Acting as Draco, the singers express Draco's cruel nature in songs like "Potions Yesterday," where he nastily tells Harry, "'Cause we see you for what you really are / Stupid little dork with a stupid dorky scar / And it's okay / It's really great / 'Cause I hate you / And so does Snape" or in casually discussing death in the suitably named song "Hippogriffs Deserve to Die" (Draco and the Malfoys, *Draco and the Malfoys*). He's often pompous and egotistical, too, by gloating about how his broomstick is better or in telling Ron Weasley, "Your family is poor and I know for sure / That I am so much better than you 'cause your family, / Your family is poor" ("Your Family Is Poor," *Draco and the Malfoys*). In fact, the band has Draco mention often his wealth as a reason for his superiority, such as in "My Dad Is Rich." Also, many of the titles within their albums reveal how much they kept Draco in his bullying nature (e.g. "In Which I Kick Harry Potter in the Face"—a retaliatory song to Harry and the Potters' "In Which Draco Malfoy Cries Like a Baby"—and "Messing with a Passed-Out Neville") keeping Draco in his othered state as the stereotypical mean, bullying Slytherin.

The band reveals, though, that Draco is not without conscience or feeling by creating songs that illustrate this othered character as a typical self-conscious person who makes mistakes. As a young eleven year old, Mehlenbacher and Ross sing about Draco's ability to be hurt by being slighted in "Why Won't You Shake My Hand?", asking Harry for an answer to the question and accusing,

"You make me look like a jerk / Do you think that you're better than me? / Well that hurts" (*Draco and the Malfoys*). And like a lot of teens, Draco can be somewhat regretful about wasting his time in school, as shown in the repetitive lyrics of "I should have done way more stuff in the books" in the song "Out of Ideas" (*It's a Slytherin World*), or he can have deeper regrets and admit his doubt in himself, such as in his agreement with Voldemort to kill Dumbledore. In the song "I Couldn't Kill Albus Dumbledore," Draco laments about Dumbledore's affection and attention towards Harry while noticing that "he never showed an interest in me" (*Draco and the Malfoys*). Draco also illustrates maturity in taking responsibility for his actions, stating, "I selected a path to face up to the wrath / Of not meeting the Dark Lord's demands" (*Draco and the Malfoys*). The Other is often attributed as the flawed person, but we all are flawed and can certainly relate to Draco's self-doubt and regrettable mistakes while growing up, experiences not limited to just the Other but to the Self, as well.

However, the band manages to also bring a positive range of human emotions to Draco, making him more accessible as an emotionally-capable person. Though often sung with humor, a softer side of Draco comes out when he sings of his love for his family, something only rarely glimpsed in the *Harry Potter* series. In response to Harry and the Potters' *And the Power of Love* album, Draco and the Malfoys responded with their song "The Power of Love:"

> Harry Potter, you know that I hate you
>
> You're always thinking that you are better than me

I know about your weapon. You think I ain't got one

Well, I've got your weapon, yeah, the power of love

I know you're thinkin' "What's this guy sayin'

He don't love nobody. No, Draco's always hatin'"

Well, I'm here to tell you that that ain't true

I can love stronger and better than you

'Cause I love my mom. I love my dad, too

We all love Lord Voldemort, and we all hate you

I love my mom. I love my dad, too

We all love Lord Voldemort, and we love to hate you. (*Party Like You're Evil*)

Despite the jabs at Harry, Mehlenbacher and Ross present a Draco who actually cares for his family and is capable of love, unlike the seemingly emotionless people Slytherin House is filled with by Rowling. The singers make a point of showing the bonds Draco shares with his family, commenting on how his "mom says she loves me when she tucks me into bed" ("My Dad Is Rich," *Draco and the Malfoys*), and sometimes he voices his concerns for his mother and father at the hands of Voldemort, lamenting that "inside this house, there's a guy / Makin' my mother cry / He's always mean to my dad / Makin' my mother really sad" ("Ill," *Family*). Their 2007 EP (Extended Play—a short collection of songs not long enough to create a full album), adequately named *Family*, enables Draco's character serious expression of his emotions, voicing the strength he draws from

his family in "III," his joy—however unwillingly expressed—at Voldemort's demise due to Harry's survival and his family's salvation in "VIII," and his pride in his own son in "Epilogue." Also, Draco and the Malfoys don't limit Draco's love to only the love he has for his family. Sung in the tone of a 50's love ballad, "Pansy (You Are the Girl of My Dreams)" expresses his love interest in Pansy Parkinson.

In keeping Draco as a spoiled, obnoxious bully, Mehlenbacher and Ross illustrate the othered Draco fans know from the novels, and in showing his softer side, the singers carry Draco from Other to Self because he is relatable to goodness, a trait often attributed to the Self and not the Other; however, something that's truly unique to this fandom of Draco is Mehlenbacher and Ross's dedication to keep Draco as an Other. They keep him othered but with a connection to the Self, allowing him to be viewed still as an Other but a new perception of the Other. Like Draco, everyone has good and bad in them, but unlike most perceptions of otherness, the Other does not need to remain a stranger nor give up what makes him/her the Other. This can be seen in the band's dedication to expressing the awesomeness of being a Slytherin through Draco's voice, as in "Slytherin Pride:"

> You see us knock others down to succeed
>
> You see us as wizards who crave so much more than we need
>
> So what if we're cunning?
>
> So what if we're ambitious?

We've got something burning up inside

We've got Slytherin pride. (*It's A Slytherin World*)

The band even takes it upon itself to boldly declare how "it's a Slytherin world," a place to be taken over by Slytherins, namely Draco and his "Slytherin girl" ("It's a Slytherin World," *It's a Slytherin World*). Taking into consideration that those who are cunning and ambitious, those who are essentially Slytherins, tend to rule the world, this only reveals how much these traits of the othered Slytherins reside in so many of the world's people, be them national leaders, public figures, or the next door neighbor who owns his own chain of businesses.

The two half-brothers of Draco and the Malfoys identify themselves as Slytherins outside of portraying themselves as Draco Malfoy, and they find great pride in being a Slytherin. Their song "We're Slytherins!" is a statement towards those who have accused Mehlenbacher and Ross of not fulfilling criteria to be considered Slytherins:

You say we're such nice guys,

That we're Gryffindors in disguise,

You say that Hufflepuff's our lot,

Well that's a narrow view of Slytherin you got. (*It's a Slytherin World*)

Just as Lalonde points out how narrow-minded it is of Dumbledore to view Snape's heroism as something abnormal for a Slytherin, Mehlenbacher and Ross find the perception that Slytherins lack good qualities to be stereotypical; instead,

they feel that Slytherins are capable of having noble traits such as bravery or a strong work ethic, which are usually attributed to Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs. They even compare Gryffindors as being like Slytherins "except you bought the hype," that it's only Gryffindors' popularity that makes them different from Slytherins as they are just as ambitious and cunning as any Slytherin (*It's a Slytherin World*). Not only has fandom allowed the Slytherin characters like Draco to finally speak against the stereotyping and flat portrayals of them as villains, but as more fans adopt the Other as an identity of themselves, like Mehlenbacher and Ross have done, the greater chance the Other has of being understood as something not separate from the Self but one with it.

Conclusion

Just as any minority group desires for its voice to be heard over the majority's powerful sway, a group of fans of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series needed its voice heard, too. With so much fandom created to illustrate the multiplicity of the Slytherins, from sympathetic to rebellious to humorous to, yes, even cruel, Slytherin fans have achieved a whole new meaning behind what it is to be a Slytherin, so much more complex and human than what Rowling was able to create. This re-creation of the Other is not just something isolated to fans of the *Harry Potter* series, either. This broader view of the Other is revealing a societal need for the Other to be rethought, for as Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington explain about fandom, "Studies of fan audiences help us to understand and meet

challenges far beyond the realm of popular culture because they tell us something about the way in which we relate to those around us" (10). Through fandom, hundreds if not thousands of fans have illustrated a culture's need for the identity of the Other to be rewritten, and with the evidence in the unexpected popularity of Slytherin-as-Other-fandom appearing in fan fiction, fan-made *YouTube* productions, and wrock, this perception of the Other is spreading.

No longer are we in a society that unquestioningly allows the Other to be isolated from the Self, or as Lalonde put it, "The reluctance of a generation to simply accept a group of people as evil because it is told they are with a minority of evidence is growing." And the Other cannot become the Self, either, completely disappearing into the Self but we must, as Kearney encourages, "keep in contact with the other" so that it is never too strange or distant for the Self to notice it (81). It is when the Other becomes too different from the Self that we often lose sight of the fact the Other and the Self are the same. We are only perceiving identities to one or the other based on our self-identification within this dichotomy; as I am the Self, you must be the Other, but if you identify as the Self, then I must be the Other.

Slytherin fans have wisely began to understand this double-identity of Self and Other in all of us and are now expressing their acceptance of being an Other in greater numbers. Even before Mehlenbacher and Ross chose to identify themselves as Draco and emulate him in all of his good and bad traits, many other fans were stepping out of the proverbial closet and declaring their pride in

their variously-othered status. Anelli, when attending the Nimbus 2003 Harry Potter conference one year in Orlando, Florida, she noticed, "There were girls dressed as Lucius, way too many people dressed as Hermione, and surprisingly few dressed as Harry. Minor characters outnumbered the major ones at least two to one" (206). Nine years later, so many fans have taken on the label of Slytherin openly and proudly, and now Slytherins (once only viewed as the Harry Potter pariahs) rival that of Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws, and even Gryffindors in the fan world. When attending any sort of Harry Potter function, it is too common to see a great deal of green and silver. Such identification with Slytherin House is not only limited to fans choosing the house themselves, either, but Rowling herself is sorting more and more fans into Slytherin House each day in her online Hogwarts-esque community, *Pottermore*. To be sorted into a house, each visitor must *be* sorted by answering a variety of questions that seem to hide any suggestion at which house is associated to which answer, meaning that one cannot simply pick the answers that seem to be attributed to a particular house as the questions do not relate to canon or even stereotypical characteristics of the four houses. Responses often posted by the newly sorted Slytherins in the Common Room tend to vary between an enthusiastic response to joining the Slytherin ranks or a shocked but happy response to being identified as a Slytherin, but the amazing thing is even by eliminating fans' choice in which house they'd like to be in, there are approximately 750,000 fans in Slytherin House, just outnumbering Ravenclaws at 715,000, and just under Hufflepuff and

Gryffindor ranks at 770,000 and nearly 800,000 respectively as of June 2012 ("The Great Hall"). Whatever Rowling believes to be traits of a Slytherin are being found more readily in fans around the world every day, and it is doubtful Rowling is classifying her Slytherin fans as bad, cruel, evil, murderous, or any other negative identifier that her canonical Slytherins are often saddled with.

What Slytherin fans have done for the Other is an amazing feat, redefining its place in society and who the Other is. These fans have lifted the veil that kept the Other separated from the us, revealing that others are not so different from ourselves and giving so much hope for a future where to be an Other is not something to frown at, where it is understood that we all are the Other and the Same and can see each other in one another. This vision of an accepted Other is something Kearney finds necessary for us:

> One of the best ways to *de-alienate* the other is to recognize (a) oneself as another and (b) the other as (in part) another self. For if ethics rightly requires me to respect the singularity of the other person, it equally requires me to recognize the other as another self bearing universal rights and responsibilities, that is, as someone capable of recognizing me in turn as a self capable of recognition and esteem. (80)

The mutual need for the Other and the Self to recognize one another and afford one another those equal "rights and responsibilities" is something these fans have embraced. More amazingly, it is through their stories, however they are

told, that this ideology will be shared and adopted, for as Bond and Michelson explain in "Writing Harry's World," the stories we absorb and the stories we tell "suggest possibilities for what we may become, and offer us cultural storylines that guide our presentation of self. Readers of literature vicariously experience dilemmas that allow them to make judgments, test the results of decisions, and imagine alternatives, and in doing so, they prepare themselves to respond to moral issues" (312). Though she may not have meant for it, Rowling inspired readers worldwide to ponder the ancient moral dilemma of how to perceive the Other, and with great wisdom and pride, they have come back with a simple answer: "We're all Slytherins."

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