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Harry Potter and the Hero Journey of Draco Malfoy

The first volume of the *Harry Potter* septology was published in 1997, and since that time tens of thousands of pages have been written analyzing the stories, characters, and content. In all those pages, very rarely is Draco Malfoy ever mentioned, and even more rarely as anything other than a footnote. This is a great oversight, because he is the character with one of the most difficult and important changes throughout the storyline. Although Draco Malfoy is a relatively minor character within the series, a closer inspection of his character development reveals that this young boy, who grew up idolizing and imitating his father, comes to be a young adult wizard that rejects his father's path. This paper will explore the journey that he takes, how this journey qualifies as a hero journey, and the importance of his transformation. Harry Potter is the protagonist of the series, and there is little question that he is also the hero of it; many papers have been written already proving that very point. What is more contentious is the idea that Draco Malfoy is a hero in his own right and takes a journey that many readers can relate to and learn from. Before looking at what constitutes a hero in the field of literature, it is important to look at Draco Malfoy and the progression of his character throughout the books.

When the series starts, Draco is a character that loves to bully others as a way to feel more important. He quickly develops an antagonistic relationship with Harry Potter and his friends, often going out of his way to single them out for negative attention. The very first glimpse the reader gets of Draco is when he first meets Harry while they are both getting school supplies. After greeting Harry, his immediate course of action is to brag about what he is going to make his parents do for him. In an attempt to prove how important he is, he says, "Then I'm

going to drag [my parents] off to look at racing brooms. I don't see why first years can't have their own. I think I'll bully Father into getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow" (SS 77). He is a child used to getting his own way, and certain that he is too important to follow the rules.

In the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, the reader finds out that Draco's father is a supporter of Lord Voldemort's, the primary villain of the series. Harry accidentally finds himself in Knockturn Alley, a wizarding area with shops devoted to dark magic, and finds Lucius and Draco Malfoy there, as well. Lucius tries to sell an artifact to a store owner, managing to complain about Draco's grades in the process. Draco immediately whines that his poor grades are not his fault, as he is continually beaten out by Hermione Granger. Lucius responds, "I would have thought you'd be ashamed that a girl of no wizard family beat you in every exam" (CS 52). Lucius here is about to both point out that he has expectations of Draco that he is not living up to, as well as focus on the fact that Hermione's parents are not wizards to shame him more deeply. Lucius is deeply prejudiced against any members of the magical community who do not have two magical parents, and he is eager to pass this prejudice along to Draco.

In book three, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Draco's character continues to taunt Harry, Ron, and Hermione when he sees them. Aside from this, during a Care of Magical Creatures class, Draco does not show proper respect to a hippogriff (a part eagle, part lion magical creature) and is bitten; Draco then melodramatically milks that injury and is able to force other students to do some of his work for him. Progressing on to the next book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the reader, having seen that taunting runs in the Malfoy family when Lucius Malfoy ran into Ron Weasley's father in *Chamber of Secrets*, has it confirmed when Lucius sees the Weasley family during a sporting event. Animosity runs between the two

families, with members of each family taking part in prolonging the feud. The reader begins to see Draco's behavior changing when the followers of Lord Voldemort break up the festivities at this sporting event and he warns Harry and Ron to get Hermione to safety (GF 121-22). Also, at the winter dance at their school, Draco's opinion is seen to be changing when he sees Hermione Granger and he thinks she looks so lovely that he cannot think of a single insult to throw at her (GF 414). However, Draco is not an entirely different person and the reader still sees him picking on Ron, and being condescending toward Hagrid, the Care of Magical Creatures teacher.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, the fifth book in the series, finds Draco experiencing an uptick in power, as he is made not only a prefect, but later on, a member of Umbridge's Inquisitorial Squad. Umbridge is a particularly nasty teacher, with powerful political contacts and a penchant for corporal punishment. She creates the Inquisitorial Squad to keep the Hogwarts' students under her thumb. True to Draco's character thus far, he continues to taunt his fellow students by making fun of them and lording his newly found power over them.

In the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the reader finds out that Lord Voldemort has given Draco a task, one that is basically a lost cause. The task is so far beyond Draco's abilities, it is obvious that the Dark Lord actually wants him to fail at the task, it having been given to him in retribution for Draco's father previousl failing a task the Dark Lord gave him (this failure prompted several Death Eaters to go to wizarding prison). Draco continues to be rude to his classmates, when he can even be bothered to focus on them. In the only bit of physical violence Draco condescends to in the story, he smashes his foot into Harry's face, in retaliation for Harry's hand in Lucius ending up in prison (HB 154). In classes, Draco is often portrayed as inattentive, spilling potion on himself at one point, and getting yelled at by a teacher for lack of focus at another. Until this point in the series, Draco had been on his house's

Quidditch team, actively participating in the wizarding sport. In *Half-Blood Prince*, a different Draco emerges: he doesn't play in the Quidditch game, sneaking off by himself while the other students are preoccupied with the game. He also spends a lot of time working on his impossible task, begrudging any time he has to spend away from it (HB 521).

Further, Draco's emotional stability suffers in this book. In one scene, Harry finds Draco in the girl's bathroom (one that is haunted by a ghost, and therefore almost never frequented by students). Draco is clearly very upset, and the ghost is trying to provide some comfort, showing a connection between the two and hinting that this is not the first time Draco has sought solace in this location. His emotional state is evident when he says, "No one can help me" and "He'll kill me," as well as when Harry finds him crying (HB 522). This is the most vulnerable view the reader gets of Draco, and one of the most vulnerable of any character in the series. Clearly, he is a young man under immense pressure and beginning to crack because of it. Draco's task, and the cause of his emotional distress, is revealed when he corners Dumbledore in the Astronomy Tower and manages to disarm him. Dumbledore repeatedly tells Draco that he is not a killer, showing that he believes there is more to Draco than Draco has shown in the previous books. Harry notes that Draco looked like he either wanted to shout or throw up; obviously he is not in control of the situation, no matter what he would like others to believe (HB 586). Ultimately, he cannot kill Dumbledore, and the task is completed by another of Lord Voldemort's followers.

Draco is a changed young man when he is brought on the scene again in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the last book in the series. In the opening scenes, the reader discovers that Lord Voldemort has made the Malfoy's house his headquarters; despite the location, the Malfoys have fallen even further from favor with Lord Voldemort. Draco is made to witness one of his teachers being eaten by a snake in the opening pages; he is then out of sight until over 400

pages later, when Harry, Hermione, and Ron have been captured and brought to Malfoy Manor. Draco is asked to confirm their identities; a positive identification would put the Malfoy family back in Lord Voldemort's good graces. However, despite the potential benefit to his family, Draco will not do it. The trio manages to escape and Draco is not seen again until the Final Battle between Harry and Lord Voldemort. Draco runs into the trio and keeps his bodyguards, Crabbe and Goyle, from hurting them.

In the epilogue to the books, the reader is given a glimpse of future Draco arriving with his wife and son to catch the train to Hogwarts. He nods to Harry, Ron, and Hermione when he sees them; he does not go over and talk to them in a friendly manner, but neither does he taunt or aggravate them in any way. In the further information that J.K. Rowling wrote for her website, Pottermore, she revealed that Draco's goal as a parent was to "raise Scorpius to be a much kinder and more tolerant Malfoy than he was in his own youth" (Pottermore - Draco Malfoy). From a spoiled brat in the first book, to a kinder father, wanting more for his son than he had himself – this transition is not only important character development, but also the essence of his hero journey.

In an article about protagonists in children's literature, Jani L. Barker makes the point that sometimes people change because the thing they thought they always wanted did not turn out to be as wonderful as they dreamed. She says "moral development in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* is intertwined with Jonas's discoveries of the failings of his seemingly utopian community as he comes of age and grows in wisdom" (105-6). While Barker is talking about a different book, this quote can easily apply to Draco's situation, as well. When he was young, he blindly followed the ideals that his father taught him, finding no reason to question them; however, as he grew older, and began to see the consequences of those beliefs, he realized he did not want the

same things as his father and he worked to break away from them and be a different kind of person.

Joseph Campbell wrote extensively about myth and heroes in literature. In *The Power of Myth*, which he wrote with Bill Moyers, the hero journey is defined as one that “requires leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring them into a richer or more mature condition” (126). Using this definition, Draco’s transformation can be seen as a type of hero journey. He starts out in one condition and ends up in a deeper, richer place. While he progresses throughout the series, it is not until the last pages of the last book that his ultimate source of life is seen to be his son. His desire to give his son a better life is what prompts him to continue to make his own life better, solidifying the changes he started to make after realizing he did not agree with his parents beliefs and that they had literal life-and-death consequences for him.

In an essay about the heroic journey within the *Harry Potter* series, Ruth Anne Robbins discusses how Harry Potter completes the hero’s journey. She writes that the final part of the hero’s journey “includes slaying the dragon and receiving ‘the ultimate boon.’ In life, however, a dragon can be something that is intangible and internal to the hero” (312). When Draco’s story is seen as a hero journey, the dragon he must overcome is the prejudicial beliefs of his father and the ultimate boon he receives is the ability to offer his son a better life. As discussed previously, initially Draco is happy to go along with his father’s beliefs and his loyalty to Lord Voldemort. However, when given his own task to complete as a punishment, the stress causes him a near mental breakdown, allowing Draco to see the negative impact of his parents’ beliefs and causing him to find the strength to begin to choose a different way. This choice ultimately allows his son a better future, one free from the prejudices supported and sustained by Lord Voldemort and his followers, making Draco a hero in the world of Harry Potter.

It is not unheard of within the scholarly circles surrounding Harry Potter for characters that on the surface appear to be villains to be critiqued and shown to be hidden heroes of the series. By looking at one such character development, Draco's journey becomes more plausible, as it is shown that it is possible for a villainous character to make such a change. Sarah Margaret Kniesler uses Campbell and Moyer's definition of the hero journey as "[requiring] leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring [the character] into a richer or more mature condition" to discuss the hero journey of one such supposed villain (126). Kniesler discusses Narcissa Malfoy, Draco's mother, and how her maternal instincts were the impetus for her transformation. Throughout the series Narcissa is willing to do anything to protect her son, including participating in an Unbreakable Vow, an act illegal in the wizarding world, and lying to Lord Voldemort, whom she was avowedly loyal to. Kniesler points out that "for most of the series, [Narcissa] would certainly serve up Harry's life if it were to benefit her son" (276). Despite this willingness to protect her son at the expense of Harry's life, a single act in the final book sways the audience in her favor, and shines a more heroic light upon her. She lies to Voldemort in the final pages of the series, telling him that he has successfully killed Harry Potter, a lie which she believes is the only way she will see her son alive again, and which ultimately allows Harry an opportunity to kill Voldemort and save the wizarding world. Kniesler sees this act of free will as the point where Narcissa crosses over from villain to hero. She says that in "acting of her own discretion in order to protect her son, Narcissa moves toward a resolution that finds her heroic, not just for Draco, but for the entire series" (277). In a similar vein, Draco's decisions at the end of the series, to protect Harry Potter and his friends, to marry someone with different beliefs than his parents, and to raise his son with a more open mind, poise him to cross over into hero territory, as well.

Having established that Draco's character does transform throughout the series, that this transformation is equivalent to a hero's journey, and also that it is not unheard of for characters that start out as villains to become heroes, let's now briefly look at why his journey, in particular, is of such importance. Robbins points out that readers "understand narrative because we join the story and see ourselves as part of it: we place ourselves into the story and walk with the characters" (310). This association that the reader makes with characters means that whatever situations the characters go through, the reader can learn something from; when the characters navigate a situation correctly, the reader learns what to do in a similar situation, when the characters navigate a situation poorly, they learn what not to do. This idea is especially important when *Harry Potter's* audience is taken into account; while people of all ages enjoy the story, these books are written at a 5th-6th grade reading level, making them target reading material for people getting ready to enter their teenage years. Because this specific age group is embarking on a journey of their own, and because readers relate to the characters they read, Draco's hero journey becomes even more important, as he is the only character who must mature by rejecting his father's path.

The main characters in the series, Harry, Ron, and Hermione, all fight on the side of good from the very first book, and none of them are in a situation where they need to go against their parents in order to do so. Granted, Harry's parents are dead, and Hermione's parents are not part of the magical world, but for both of them, the adults they are closest to, and those they spend the most time with, are all fighting for good, and therefore provide both encouragement and a support system, for them to do the same. All three of them have numerous role models to look to for guidance and help throughout their journey. As for the other young characters introduced in the series, they all either fight on the side of their parents (whether for good or evil), or the reader

is not given any information that would contradict that assessment. Except for in the case of Draco Malfoy.

In Draco's life, the adults all fight for evil, and encourage and expect him to do the same. Members of his family who did not hold to the same prejudices, and who refused to fight for Lord Voldemort were disowned, disinherited, and treated as if they never existed. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the reader learns of one such character, Sirius Black, that realized he no longer held the same beliefs as his parents; he was disowned and burned off of the family tree. Luckily for him, he was able to go live with a friend's family that was fighting for good. In Draco's case, he had no friends who were fighting for good, and even if he did, he had no way of leaving Lord Voldemort without his parents being tortured, and likely killed. With no real way out, Draco had to fight against evil in more subtle ways until Lord Voldemort was defeated, and the danger to his parents was nullified. Then he was able to fully reject his father's beliefs by choosing a wife who believed as he did, rather than as his parents did, and by raising his son without prejudices.

While there are likely not many young adults who find themselves in a situation as literally life and death as Draco's, even in less perilous circumstances, he provides a model for what it looks like to reject a parent's beliefs, especially without a support system in place, and also what it looks like to transform an aspect of your character that you may not like. Being shown what this possibility looks like gives readers a guide they may not have previously realized they needed. A cursory reading of the Harry Potter series may not reveal Draco as anything other than a bully; but while his journey is subtle, it is extremely valuable. As he travels from proud, elitist bully, to independent thinker, to a father who simply wants what is best for his son, the reader is invited to realize that they, too, have more choices in their life than they may

realize. This makes Draco's character development a vitally important lesson with the *Harry Potter* series.

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