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**Rubeus Hagrid:
The Resolution of Contraries, Part 1: Giant, Wild Man, and Saint**

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Rubeus Hagrid is full of contradictions. His untamable appearance, his penchant for drinking, and his fondness for dangerous creatures contrasts his gentle nature, his capacious love for Harry, and his unflinching trust in Dumbledore (“Great man, Dumbledore”).¹ Hagrid is a half-giant, a hybrid, and within himself, he is able to embody and reconcile impossibilities. Hagrid is Harry’s (and the reader’s) guide into J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* universe, a space firmly rooted in the medieval. From magical castles to progressions of the romance hero, medieval aspects underpin much of Rowling’s work.² Medieval analogues abound in relation to Hagrid and shed light onto the contradictions that constitute Hagrid’s character.

Contradictions do abound. Hagrid’s appearance contrasts to and contradicts his nature, as *Goblet of Fire* makes clear: “About twice as tall as a normal man, and at least three times as broad, Hagrid, with his long, wild, tangled black hair and beard, looked slightly alarming—a misleading impression, for Harry, Ron, and Hermione knew Hagrid to possess a very kind nature.”³ His appearance belying his character is merely one of Hagrid’s many seeming contradictions. Hagrid spills important secrets (“I told the evil git how ter ger past Fluffy!”⁴), and yet Hagrid is trusted by Dumbledore, frequently tasked with guarding Harry. He both drinks and cares to excess, with a penchant for loving the unlovable. Hagrid embodies both supra-masculine qualities (wielding a crossbow) and feminine qualities (darning socks, wearing a frilly pink apron). His contraries are also noted by critics. Annette Wannamaker sees Hagrid as both masculine and feminine, and praises his “seemingly incongruent combination of both traditionally masculine and

¹ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 395.

² Heather Arden and Kathryn Lorenz, “The Harry Potter Stories and French Arthurian Romance,” *Arthuriana* 13, no. 2 (2003): 54-68; Lisa Hopkins, “Harry Potter and Narratives of Destiny,” in *Reading Harry Potter Again: New Critical Essays*, ed. Giselle Liza Anatol (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 63-75; Gail Orgelfinger, “J. K. Rowling’s Medieval Bestiary,” in *Studies in Medievalism XVII: Defining Medievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 141-160; Renée Ward, “Harry Potter Medievalism,” in *Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Gail Ashton (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 263-274.

³ Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 159.

⁴ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 219.

unconventionally masculine traits.”⁵ For Marion Rana these contradictions make Hagrid ridiculous, while John Granger argues these contradictions are intentional.⁶

Medieval elements underpin and explain Hagrid’s contradictory nature—contraries that Hagrid both exposes and resolves. And Hagrid is girded with medieval analogues—giants, wild men, saints, and the alchemical *rebis*. Medievalism also complicates the readings of Hagrid’s character beyond the common relief of a “ne-er do well,” a working-class caricature, ridiculed and unelevated, thanks to poor education.⁷ Instead, his contradictions and medieval underpinnings expose Hagrid as essential to Harry’s *bildungsroman*. This study probes the medieval components surrounding Rowling’s giant, and in this first part, by exploring giants, wild men, etymologies, and saints, argues that around the figure of Hagrid contradictions—or polarities or incongruities—are deliberately raised and provoked, but these are also continuously reconciled—making Hagrid a symbol of opposite forces conjoining.

Contradictions and Etymologies

Etymologies are important in Rowling’s work, as many of her names illuminate the character’s nature.⁸ In fact, etymology-as-meaning is steeped in classical and medieval precedent, used by the Roman poet Varro and capitalized upon by Isidore of Seville.⁹ Hagrid’s answer to Harry’s question “Who are you?” provides a good starting point for both Hagrid’s medievalism and his contradictions: “Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts.”¹⁰ In Latin “rubeus” is both a noun meaning the precious stone ruby (“rubi” in Old French), and an adjective meaning “red,” specifically the red of livestock.¹¹

⁵ Annette Wannamaker, “Men in Cloaks and High-heeled Boots, Men Wielding Pink Umbrellas: Witchy Masculinities in the *Harry Potter* Novels,” *The Looking Glass* 10, no.1 (2006), <https://ojs.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/tlg/article/view/96>.

⁶ Marion Rana, *Creating Magical Worlds: Otherness and Othering in Harry Potter* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), 53; John Granger, *Unlocking Harry Potter: Five Keys for the Serious Reader* (Wayne: Zossima Press, 2007), 47-117.

⁷ Rana, *Creating Magical Worlds*, 49-54; Elaine Ostry, “Accepting Mudbloods: The Ambivalent Social Vision of J. K. Rowling’s Fairy Tales,” in *Reading Harry Potter: Potter: Critical Essays*, ed. Giselle Liza Anatol (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 89-101, 95-96; Farah Mendlesohn, “Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Construction of Authority,” in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, ed. Lana A. Whited (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 159-181, 166.

⁸ On Rowling’s etymologies, see John Granger, *Looking for God in Harry Potter* (Wheaton: Salt River, 2004), 111-126.

⁹ Natalie Goodison, *Introducing the Medieval Swan* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2022), 17-19.

¹⁰ Rowling, *Philosopher’s Stone*, 40.

¹¹ “Rubeus” (n.), under the source-word “rubinus,” and “rubus” (n.), in *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, eds. J.F. Niermeyer and C. van de Kieft, rev. J.W.J. Burgers, <https://dictionaries.brillonline.com/niermeyer>; “rubeus” (adj.), “red of oxen,” *Whitaker’s Words Online*, <https://latin-words.com/>; “rubi” (n., from “ruebues”) in *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, <https://anglo-norman.net/>.

Both rubies and ruby-red are associated with Hagrid's house, Gryffindor.¹² For example, "rubies the size of eggs" inset the Sword of Gryffindor.¹³ However, the Latin "Rubeus" also describes the bramble bush, thus evoking the natural world (which Hagrid frequently inhabits), entanglement, and that which is wild.¹⁴ Rowling repeatedly uses these qualifiers to describe Hagrid: "he looked simply too big to be allowed, and so *wild*—long *tangles* of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face."¹⁵ Thus Hagrid's praenomen "rubeus" connotes opposites: that which is royal, red, and priceless and that which is tangled, brambly, and wild.

The etymology behind "Hagrid" stems from two Old English words: "haegtesse" (witch) and "ridan" (to ride, rock, or swing). The two words do not appear combined as "hag-ridden" until the late seventeenth century to refer (perhaps prudishly) to "troubled sleep due to the presence of a witch" and "afflicted by nightmare."¹⁶ Rowling says that she derived the surname Hagrid from an "old English word, meaning – if you were hagrid – [. . .] you'd had a bad night."¹⁷ But Hagrid's bad nights have little to do with sex or nightmares: "Hagrid is a big drinker," says Rowling; "he has a lot of bad nights."¹⁸ Hagrid's excessive drinking habits coincides with medieval giants, who are typified by excessive appetites.¹⁹ While "Hagrid" denotes a certain proclivity towards drink, "Rubeus" nods toward nobility and the importance Rowling places on Hagrid's role within her work. The full name "Rubeus Hagrid" thus embraces seeming polarities: a precious gem, a wild bramble, a drinking binge—and all add up to the equivalent of a diamond-in-the-rough. The pairing of royalty with imperfection summarizes the character within his name.

Giant

Hagrid's contradictions stem from a medieval relief of giants. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen articulates that a medieval giant embodies a certain contradiction: "the giant conjoined

¹² J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 320; for Hagrid as a Gryffindor, see "Barnes and Noble & Yahoo! chat with J.K. Rowling, *barnesandnoble.com*, October 20, 2000," Accio Quote! Archive, <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2000/1000-livechat-barnesnoble.html>.

¹³ Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, 235.

¹⁴ "rubeus" (adj.) in *Whitaker's Words Online*, <https://latin-words.com/>.

¹⁵ Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 16; emphasis mine.

¹⁶ "haegtesse," (n.) and "ridan" (v.) in *Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, <https://bosworthtoller.com/>; "hag-ridden" (adj.), Oxford English Dictionary Online, <http://www.oed.com>. My thanks to Megan Cavell, a specialist in Old English, for her advice.

¹⁷ "Lydon, Christopher. J. K. Rowling interview transcript, *The Connection* (WBUR Radio), 12 October, 1999," Accio Quote! Archive, <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/1999/1099-connectiontransc2.htm>.

¹⁸ "Lydon, Christopher. J. K. Rowling interview transcript."

¹⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xiii.

absolute otherness with reassuring familiarity,” producing “an intimate alterity.”²⁰ Just as Hagrid contains both male and female qualities, so too the medieval “giant shares more with the feminine, and specifically with the maternal, than his excessively male form might suggest.”²¹ Just as Hagrid is known to drink to excess, so too medieval giants are typified by their excess consumption of drink, food and sex.²² The giants of medieval literature thus underpin Hagrid’s character.

Hagrid’s binaries move beyond his name into his very body. As the offspring of a giantess and wizard, Hagrid is a “giant of a man.”²³ His constitution as part-wizard and part-giant makes Hagrid the physical product of a union of opposites—a hybrid, whose heritage is problematic.²⁴ In the *Harry Potter* books, giants are stigmatized as monstrous: when Hagrid is “outed” as a giant in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the journalist Rita Skeeter reveals wizards stigmatize giants as “bloodthirsty and brutal.”²⁵ She relays that the British population of giants declined due to inter-group warfare, and those that survived joined the dark wizard Voldemort, killed many, and were themselves killed by, the aurors who hunt dark wizards.²⁶ Although none remain in Britain, giants, such as Hagrid’s half-brother Grawp, inhabit mountainous regions abroad.²⁷

These giants, and their places of habitation, have analogues in medieval literature. Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain* records a medieval account of British giants. He describes the settlement of Albion by Aeneas’s descendent Brutus and his companions, who found that Albion was “uninhabited except by a few giants.” Their conquest drove the giants “to caves in the mountains.”²⁸ According to Geoffrey, the area with the most giants was Cornwall—a region settled by and named after Corineus, a man who particularly relished fighting giants.²⁹ Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Hagrid originates near this area. Rowling has described her pleasure at Stephen Fry’s reproduction of Hagrid’s accent “as a kind of Somerset” because “Hagrid

²⁰ Cohen, *Of Giants*, xii.

²¹ Cohen, *Of Giants*, xii.

²² Cohen, *Of Giants*, xiii.

²³ Rowling, *Philosopher’s Stone*, 39.

²⁴ Indeed, only one other half-giant hybrid appears in the books: Madame Olympe Maxime, headmistress of the French Beauxbatons Academy of Magic.

²⁵ Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 382.

²⁶ Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 382.

²⁷ Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 382; J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 377.

²⁸ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. and ed. Michael A. Faletra (Peterborough: Broadview, 2007), 56.

²⁹ Geoffrey, *History*, 57.

was West Country.”³⁰ The West Country encompasses Somerset, Devonshire, and Cornwall, so Hagrid’s origin can be placed either within or bordering upon Geoffrey’s domain of giants.

The only giant mentioned by name in Geoffrey’s account is Gogmagog, described as twelve cubits tall and so strong that “he once uprooted an oak tree as if it were a hazel-shoot.”³¹ This description resonates in Hagrid’s half-brother Grawp who, while Hagrid is introducing him to Harry, spends most of the time pulling up a pine tree.³² Geoffrey’s giants, after attacking the Britons during a feast, come to an unfortunate end: the Britons exterminate them, and Gogmagog, selected to wrestle with Corineus, is tossed off a cliff into the sea. This pseudo-historical record of giants forcibly displaced and consigned to the more uninhabitable geographical regions echoes Rowling’s views of wizard domination, and scholars have drawn parallels between these and other displaced peoples.³³ While Geoffrey’s description of giants illuminates aspects of Rowling’s text, its only distinct echo within Hagrid, apart from his size, is his speech: the location associated with Hagrid’s accent stems from the very region inhabited by Geoffrey’s giants.

Female giants and their maternal natures are discussed in both medieval texts and Rowling’s work. The thirteenth-century *De Origine Gigantum* roots the origins of giants in female misconduct.³⁴ In *De Origine*, twenty-four sisters plot to murder their husbands during the intimate act of copulation unless they grant their wives full sovereignty. Their intended plot is characterized as a two-fold revulsion against nature in medieval religious ideology: first, their desire to subjugate their husbands violates the natural order ordained by God, and second, their intended crime destroys the sacred unity of the family and defiles their nurturing maternal role. Their plot is therefore *contra naturam* (against nature), and it is this that Isidore defines as monstrous.³⁵ When their plot is discovered,

³⁰ “Living with Harry Potter,” Interview by Stephen Fry, BBC Radio 4, December 10, 2005,” Accio Quote! Archive, <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2005/1205-bbc-fry.html>; Mendlesohn, “Crowing,” 166.

³¹ Geoffrey, *History*, 57. See also Iver B. Neumann, “Naturalizing Geography: Harry Potter and the Realms of Muggles, Magic Folks, and Giants,” in *Harry Potter and International Relations*, eds. Daniel H. Nexon and Iver B. Neumann (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 157-175.

³² Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 613, 619.

³³ Julia Park, “Class and Socioeconomic Identity in Harry Potter’s England,” in *Reading Harry Potter*, 185; Iver B. Neumann, “Naturalizing Geography,” 157-175; Giselle Liza Anatol, “The Replication of Victorian Racial Ideology in Harry Potter,” in *Reading Harry Potter Again*, ed. Giselle Liza Anatol (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 109-125.

³⁴ James P. Carley and Julia Crick, “Constructing Albion’s Past: An Annotated Edition of *De Origine Gigantum*,” *Arthurian Literature* 13 (1995), 41-144; Ruth Evans, “Gigantic Origins: An Annotated Translation of *De Origine Gigantum*,” *Arthurian Literature* 16 (1998), 197-211; further references are to Evan’s translation. For more, see Cohen, *Of Giants*, 45-61.

³⁵ See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 111-112; Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. G. R. Evans, trans. Henry Bettenson

the women are exiled in a rudderless boat; they settle on uninhabited land they call Albion. However, the women's sexual arousal attracts supernatural *incubi* who copulate with and impregnate the sisters.³⁶ These women, who have behaved *contra naturam*, copulate with that which is *contra naturam* (inhuman): it thus follows that "loathsome things should be born from loathsome things."³⁷ Their progeny are giants: vast in size and strength, horrifying in appearance. The sons copulate with their aunts and mothers, and incest begets this monstrous race. Unlike Geoffrey's giants, these prefer to live in "subterranean cave-dwellings and surrounded them with great walls and ditches."³⁸ *De Origine*, seeking perhaps to justify the conquest of Brutus, reads: "They even loved the mountains for homes, believing themselves to be most safe by remaining in lofty places."³⁹ As in Geoffrey's account, giants settle in mountains—not through colonization—but through preference. Their monstrous nature is writ large in their monstrous appearance, and the sins of the mother visited on her offspring.⁴⁰ It is the sisters' lack of maternal nature, of intending crimes against familial structures and violating the sanctity of nature, that ultimately begets the giant race in Britain. The non-maternal nature of the sisters is perhaps reflected directly in Rowling's portrayal of Hagrid's mother, the giantess Fridwulfa, who abandoned her young family. Hagrid reflects that "She wasn't really the maternal sort. Well . . . it's not in their natures, is it?"⁴¹

Rowling reworks these medieval elements of giants in Hagrid, as his hybrid status precludes his acceptance into the giant community: while the mountains are a place of refuge for him, he is much more at home in his cabin, tending pumpkins the size of boulders; while he possess supra-human strength, he uses it, not to save himself, but in defense of those he loves.⁴² Hagrid possesses an abundance of the maternal instinct his mother lacked. He lines the crates of Blast Ended Skrewts with pillows and sends his pet dragon Norbert off to Romania with a teddy bear.⁴³ As he leaves baby Harry on Privet

(London: Penguin Books, 2003), specifically Book XVI; and Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), specifically Book II.

³⁶ Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). *Incubi* generally refer to demons who shape shift into human likeness in order to tempt humans to procreate with them. Their exact nature was hotly debated over the Middle Ages.

³⁷ Evans, *De Origine*, ll. 119-20.

³⁸ Evans, *De Origine*, ll. 122-23.

³⁹ Evans, *De Origine*, ll. 125-26.

⁴⁰ See Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, and Cohen, *Of Giants*.

⁴¹ Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 372.

⁴² Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 636.

⁴³ Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 321; *Philosopher's Stone*, 175. Blast Ended Skrewts are unappealing magical beasts that seem to be something like a giant scorpion.

Drive, he weeps and gives him a “scratchy, whiskery kiss.”⁴⁴ Hagrid is thus, paradoxically, maternal and supra-masculine. Consequently, Hagrid is not quite like either medieval or Rowling’s giants. Instead Hagrid represents a conjoining of opposite forces, both masculine and maternal, wild and tender—these seeming polarities are merged in his hybrid character.

Hagrid’s hybridity means that he is neither fully giant nor fully wizard; he cannot fully inhabit either world with ease. He borders both, uneasily. At Hogwarts his cabin is on the edge of the grounds, bordering the wilds of the Forbidden Forest and the tamed landscape of the Castle (a bastion of wizarding education). His body stands out as a hybrid, too. While he is not a sixteen-foot giant, like his half-brother, he is immensely tall. Nor does he easily conform to wizarding appearances of respectability, and his attempts to do so frequently go awry (“he had certainly attempted to comb his hair—Harry could see the comb’s broken teeth tangled in it”⁴⁵). Just as Hagrid’s accent gestures to the medieval location of giants, and his hut rests on the border between the Forbidden Forest and the Hogwarts grounds, so Hagrid himself straddles the world of both wizard and giant, not fully accepted by either yet marked by the other.

Hagrid’s hybrid position within the wizarding world draws parallels between Harry and Hagrid, which Hagrid brings to Harry’s attention, telling Harry, “When I firs’ met you, you reminded me o’ me a bit. Mum an’ Dad gone, an’ you was feelin’ like yeh wouldn’ fit in at Hogwarts, remember?”⁴⁶ Both Hagrid and Harry are orphans; both are outsiders; both suffer media smear campaigns. Their remarkable similarities also extend to gifts that their mothers give their children through their blood. As the odious headmistress Dolores Umbridge expands her power over Hogwarts, she attacks Hagrid with a cohort of Ministry wizards to forcibly remove him to the wizard prison Azkaban. The wizards’ attempts to stun Professor McGonagall and Hagrid’s dog Fang succeed; against Hagrid, their spells are ineffective. Harry watches as spells fly at Hagrid, “yet somehow they seemed to be bouncing off him. He was still upright, and still, as far as Harry could see, fighting.”⁴⁷ Later, when Ron asks why this was, Hermione replies, “It’ll be his giant blood [. . .] It’s very hard to stun a giant.”⁴⁸ The blood of Hagrid’s mother that runs through his veins protects his very skin. Fridwulfa’s mark upon Hagrid is both a blessing and a curse: while her blood

⁴⁴ Rowling, *Philosopher’s Stone*, 17.

⁴⁵ Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 284.

⁴⁶ Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 396; For more on mothers, see Kate Fulton and Alicia L. Skipper, “Gone but Not Forgotten: The Missing Mothers of the Wizarding World,” *Inside the World of Harry Potter*, ed. Christopher Bell (Jefferson: McFarland, 2018), 7-20; and Margaret S. Mauk, “Your Mother Died to Save You: The Influence of Mothers in Constructing Moral Frameworks for Violence in *Harry Potter*,” *Mythlore* 36 (2017), 123-141.

⁴⁷ Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 635.

⁴⁸ Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 637.

marginalizes Hagrid from full incorporation into wizarding society, it also offers a mark of protection. Harry's protection comes from his mother's intentional sacrificial death. Dumbledore tells Harry, "Love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark . . . It is in your very skin."⁴⁹ Lily's mark, residing in Harry's skin, makes it impossible for Voldemort to harm Harry, who cannot touch Harry without harming himself. For both Harry and Hagrid their mother's blood contains salvific properties.

Wild Man

Yet giants are not the only medieval aspect analogous to Hagrid. Rowling describes Hagrid as an "elemental force. He's like the king of the forest, or the Green Man."⁵⁰ This image too has medieval origins. The green man (also sometimes called a "wild man") is often found on the pillars of churches in medieval architecture: this seemingly wild spirit of the forest etched in holy places demonstrates another mingling of apparent polarities.⁵¹ In early medieval literature, the wild man or woman was primal, often lacking the ability to speak, and noted for being sub-human.⁵² Overtime, the image evolved to include saints or hermits seeking respite in the forest from worldly temptations, and heroes or rulers (such as Lancelot or Nebuchadnezzar) who, overcome with madness, find solace in the woods.⁵³ Eventually, the wild man or woman came to represent prelapsarian humanity: the figure who is so completely at one with nature that the perils of the woods offer no harm.⁵⁴

Both these versions of the wild man are found in *Harry Potter*. The primal wild man covered in hair, incapable of speech, and harmful to society, is represented in Voldemort's uncle Morfin: when he "dropped from the nearest tree," he was covered with rags, had filthy, matted hair, spoke only in the snake-speech of Parseltongue, and harmed both Muggles (non-magical persons) and Wizards.⁵⁵ Hagrid is the prelapsarian wild man, the foil to Morfin's primitive wild man. As Hogwarts' gamekeeper and Care of Magical Creatures Professor, Hagrid frequently displays his knowledge of the woods and wildlife. But this knowledge of magical creatures is so innate, so ingrained, that in his lessons he systematically overlooks dangerous features that might harm wizards. Hagrid seems

⁴⁹ Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 216

⁵⁰ "Robbie Coltrane on South Bank: Interview by Melvyn Bragg, *South Bank Show* (ITV1), September 25, 2006," Accio Quote! Archive, <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2006/0925-southbank.html>.

⁵¹ Lady Raglan, "The Green Man of Church Architecture," *Folklore* 50, 1 (1939), 45-57.

⁵² See Timothy Husband and Gloria Gilmore-House, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), 1-17; and Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).

⁵³ See Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993).

⁵⁴ Husband, *Wild Man*, 1-17.

⁵⁵ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 191-199.

curiously exempt from the threats monsters pose to humans. At times, Hagrid's affection for dangerous creatures is so vast it blinkers his rationality, for his size allows him to roam the forest at leisure and his kindness protects him from the most vicious creatures in the Forbidden Forest.⁵⁶ Once again in the figure of Hagrid, Rowling demonstrates a union of contraries. Hagrid as wild man—reflected in his untamable hair, his cabin near the woods, and his innate knowledge of magical creatures—also possesses the Edenic ability to love all creation, even the monstrous, and so in their presence he usually finds himself free from harm.

Perhaps the most pronounced contradiction in Hagrid is, on the one hand, his frequent bungling of secrets, and, on the other, the exceptional trust placed in Hagrid by Dumbledore. Hagrid drinks to excess, irrationally loves the monstrous, and frequently reveals secrets, yet he is consistently, even constantly, entrusted with the infinitely valuable. Despite Hagrid's failings, Dumbledore entrusts him with remarkable power: Dumbledore appoints Hagrid as gamekeeper, the Keeper of Hogwarts's Keys; Dumbledore sends Hagrid to retrieve the Philosopher's Stone and as envoy to the giants; Dumbledore designates Hagrid as Harry's first introduction to the wizarding world, and Hagrid is all the Ministry-authorized security required to protect Harry in the wizarding streets of Diagon Alley.⁵⁷ But Hagrid functions specifically as Harry's guard, guide, and courier. Hagrid first delivers the infant Harry from Godric's Hollow to his aunt and uncle on Privet Drive; eleven years later, Hagrid whisks Harry away from his relatives into the wizarding world. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry's friends serve as body doubles for him through temporary magic. As the seven identical Potters flee Privet Drive, scattering to confuse pursuit for a safe house, it is Hagrid who guards the real Harry and sacrifices his own body to ensure Harry arrives. This image of a giant-figure transporting a precious child's body to safety calls up medieval accounts of another giant: Saint Christopher.

Saint

Medieval accounts of Christopher, originally named Repobus (with assonance so resonant of "Rubeus"), typically represent him as a giant covered in hair, as one of the race of the dog-headed cynocephali, or as a heathen infidel.⁵⁸ Caxton's 1483 account describes Christopher as twelve cubits tall: a giant's height.⁵⁹ After his conversion to Christianity, Repobus's service requires him to ferry travelers across a perilous river. One day he ferries a child who grows heavier with each step of the crossing, until the weight

⁵⁶ Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, 278-79.

⁵⁷ Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 107. Diagon Alley is the London location of wizard shops.

⁵⁸ David Gordon White, *Myths of the Dog-Man* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 34-36.

⁵⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, "The Life of S. Christopher", in *The Golden Legend*, tr. William Caxton, ed. F. S. Ellis (London: Temple Classics, 1900, reprint 1922, 1931), Vol. 4, 53-57,

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/goldenlegend/GoldenLegend-Volume4.asp>.

becomes unbearable and the giant nearly drowns. The child then reveals that he is Christ and carries the weight of the world on his shoulders, a burden the giant has now shared. The Christ-child renames the giant "*Christus ferre*" (the Ferrier of Christ): Christopher. This unlikely giant chosen to bear the body of Christ embodies the notion that the lowly, the despised, and the foolish can serve holy purposes.⁶⁰

Hagrid can be read as a type of St. Christopher. Like Christopher, Hagrid is a ferrier, a ferryman. In the first book, Hagrid literally ferries Harry away from the Dursleys (who have fled to a shack-on-the-sea) in a boat. Each year, Hagrid is charged with ferrying first-years (including Harry) across the lake into Hogwarts Castle—a key rite of passage and initiation for those beginning their wizarding education. Like Christopher, Hagrid carries bodies who have supported the weight of the (wizarding) world on their shoulders: when Dumbledore dies, it is Hagrid who carries the broken body of the headmaster into his funeral service: "Hagrid was walking slowly [. . .] and in his arms, wrapped in purple velvet spangled with golden stars, was what Harry knew to be Dumbledore's body."⁶¹ Hagrid ferrying the dead Christ-figure of Dumbledore in *Half-Blood Prince* prefigures his role in *Deathly Hallows*, where he performs the same service for Harry. He witnesses Harry's apparent death and, weeping profusely, carries the "dead" body back to the castle—where "great tears splashed down upon him as Hagrid cradled Harry in his arms"—a powerful image that recalls Hagrid's seminal role of ferrying Harry.⁶² Indeed, Rowling has stated that she found the image of Hagrid carrying Harry's "dead" body so affecting that she decided not to kill the character.⁶³ Her designs for Hagrid culminate, appropriately, in a final image of him transporting the savior of the wizarding world back to the castle to await resurrection.

Casting Hagrid as St. Christopher not only fits with hagiographical framings of Rowling's work, but also echoes medieval typologies of unlikely persons ushering in new hope.⁶⁴ In fact, it is this contradiction that is so pronounced in Hagrid: that it is the unlikely, the peripheral, the gigantesque, the wild man, that is chosen to accomplish actions of

⁶⁰ "Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are," 1 Cor. 1: 26-28 (NIV). See also Granger, *Unlocking*, 189-90.

⁶¹ Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 599.

⁶² J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 582.

⁶³ "A Conversation with J. K. Rowling and Daniel Radcliffe," *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2, directed by David Yates* (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., 2011), Blu-ray, Disc 2, Extra Content, 25:55.

⁶⁴ M. Wendy Hennequin, "Harry Potter and the Legends of Saints," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 25 (2013): 67-81.

supreme importance, and through this paradox—the Magnificat of the lowly elevated—that the character is laden with primal, almost spiritual, significance. Rubeus Hagrid's narrative potency is centered in his embodiment of contradictions—contradictions unpacked through readings attentive to medievalism, which transform Hagrid from oaf and ne'er-do-well into a critical character of central importance.