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## **“Unity in Diversity: Unity in Difference”**

Исследовательская работа (эссе)

**«Фигура наставника в научной фантастике и фэнтези XX–XXI  
веках»**

«The figure of a mentor in science fiction and fantasy of the XX–XXI  
centuries»



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## Theses

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3. The development of Jo Grant’s character
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## **Introduction**

The 20th and 21st centuries have played a pivotal role in the development of various literary genres, with a particular focus on science fiction and fantasy. This is no more evident than when looking at the latest blockbuster movies - the majority of which are based on the imaginations of great literary figures such as J.R.R. Tolkien, JK Rowling and Stan Lee. Like most forms of art, these styles of writing have undergone numerous changes during the last two centuries, one of the most significant changes is what the figure of a mentor should be. Should a mentoring character be big and strong and show no sign of weakness whatsoever? Or should they be a quiet, barely noticeable character who is only brave when trouble is near? Nobody is really quite sure of that, however, what is certain is that women have definitely become more prevalent as mentoring characters in both science fiction and fantasy in the last two centuries, more than at any point in the genre's existence. In fact, females being mentor figures have not just affected the world of literature and art, but also social stereotypes and norms.

### **The leading woman in science fiction**

One genre that has been quite popular lately is science fiction and when you think of this genre one of the first things that comes to mind is undoubtedly the world-famous television series, "Dr. Who" As most of us probably know, "Dr. Who" was first broadcast in the early 1960s. Throughout the whole series, the main character, otherwise known as The Doctor, travels through different galaxies, universes and time periods in order to save civilization and help those who are in need. Travelling through outer space and different milky ways is no bed of roses, it is indeed quite a challenging task. Therefore, the Doctor almost

always has someone to accompany him on his missions to fight villains and save humanity. Every season, the companion changes and each one of them is considered to be a mentor figure, due to their contribution and influence on the doctor. Throughout the series there have been some spectacular figures of mentors, however there is one female character that stands out the most amongst others, and that is Jo Grant.

When Jo Grant was introduced to the series, well, let's just say that she did not make a good first impression on The Doctor. That happened due to Jo's clumsiness and being very accident-prone, and those are two character traits that don't come in handy when you are working a job that is so closely related to science. Jo Grant was very like a bull in a china shop whenever she was helping The Doctor in one of his labs, constantly breaking various test tubes and mixing everything up. Jo is well aware that she is not necessarily the most careful person, therefore, she tries to improve and become more collected and serene in order to improve her relationship with The Doctor. And in a short amount of time, not only does The Doctor accept the young lady's clumsiness and desire to please everybody, but they even become close friends. Through their friendship Jo's cheerfulness and her buoyant personality really balance out the tension in The Doctor's lab. It's safe to say that her light feminine energy helped to bring out the more slackened and less strict side of The Doctor himself.

Even though we might see Jo as an average, light-hearted and relaxed female character, she is a lot more than just that. We don't really see Grant's full potential, dedication and willingness to take risks until there is some sort of danger. In one episode, when on one of The Doctor's many missions, he and his team come across some villains. During the fight, Jo surprised everybody when she announced that she was ready to sacrifice herself in order to save The Doctor and the rest of his team. This came as a shock to everybody, and it really proved how strong Jo's desire to assist The Doctor and help him is. In this

episode Jo displayed her ability to be a mentor figure like no other character in the show had.

Without a doubt, Jo Grant is one of the most significant female mentor figures in science fiction. As I said before, in the beginning of her storyline, Jo was portrayed as a woman who did not know a single thing about science. That did not prevent her from growing out of that name and actually learning a thing or two about this area of study. Jo is an excellent example of how women shouldn't be limited to certain subjects or spheres of life. Seeing a female character who not only grew so much and improved throughout her storyline but also turned out to be incredibly brave really influenced the audience of "Dr. Who". The stereotypical view of women in science changed drastically after Jo appeared in the show. She served as a mentor figure to The Doctor by showing him that not everything should be taken so close to heart and that sometimes it is actually easier to simply let go of things, as well as being a character to whom young children, especially girls, could look up to. Grant demonstrated that women can thrive in science, and that they can not only stand up for themselves, but for others as well. Without a doubt, Jo Grant is by far the most influential and strong female mentoring character ever shown in a science-fiction television series.

### **The leading woman in fantasy**

One of the leading genres in literature is undoubtedly fantasy. This genre has been prominent for a very long time, and what makes fantasy such an interesting and diverse style is the endless list of imaginary elements that it consists of. The sky is the limit when it comes to fictional elements in fantasy, one of the most vivid examples of this is Joanne Kathleen Rowling's "Harry Potter " series. Talking walls, invisibility cloaks, and an endless list of mythical creatures, to name a few, fill the pages. But perhaps the real magic, however, is the depiction

of strong female characters and how this influence is shown throughout the series. J.K Rowling writes about multiple powerful women in her books, such as Professor McGonagall, Bellatrix LeStrange, and particularly, Hermione Granger, a mentoring character that has had a significant impact on the feminist discourse

In the beginning of the series, Hermione is portrayed as a nerdy, annoying, know-it-all kind of kid who craves academic validation and has only one thing on her mind; studying. We can't hide the fact that she is incredibly smart for her age, but at the same time she is willingly cocky about it, constantly talking about her outstanding academic achievements. Although most of her life revolved around education related factors, she was always ready to help out her friends and classmates during difficult times, and that is where part of her ability to be a mentor figure shines through. Most of it, however, is displayed in the middle and towards the end of the series, where not only is Hermione always willing to guide and support her companions no matter what it takes, but she is also defying gender stereotypes while doing so.

The last four "Harry Potter " books were published in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and although many women nowadays have the right to get an education and be leaders, seeing an intelligent woman who is enthusiastic about expressing her opinions is still frowned upon in many cultures and countries around the world. Enter Hermione Granger, and despite the fact that in the first couple of books she was a somewhat annoying character, much like in society, she throughout the series really changes, and becomes this book-smart, calm and incredibly logical young woman. Another side of Hermione Granger we discover is how outspoken and persuasive of a woman she is. Hermione has outstanding public speaking abilities and some pretty strong opinions for a girl her age, which she is not at all scared to voice.

By being such a strong mentoring character, Hermione Granger has become a focal point of the typecast female actually being independent and well-educated in both book and film. With such a highly-influential character J.K Rowling has

had a massive effect on feminism in fantasy, in just twenty years, more women have been portrayed as being smart and well-read, instead of dull-witted, empty-headed girls who would keep their opinion to themselves. Hermione did not just shape the world of literature, but she also exerted a lot of influence on young girls. She is a vivid example of what a good friend is by always being there to support her classmates, as well as being a role model by encouraging girls to be erudite and not afraid to speak up for themselves.

## **Conclusion**

To sum everything up, I would like to point out that fantasy and science fiction have been evolving and changing for an extremely long time and that the 20th and 21st centuries have had a major effect on not only the following genres, but literature and arts as a whole. There is no denying the fact that these styles of writing will never stop growing. Nowadays it is nothing out of the ordinary to read a book or watch a film with a strong and independent woman with a mentor figure in it. However, it was truly something abnormal in the 1900's and even early 2000's. With characters like Hermione Granger and Jo Grant being central in highly influential books and TV shows, the perception of what an ideal figure of a mentor should act and behave like has changed. A lot more intelligent and open-minded women started being shown as mentor figures. So, judging from those two examples, we can come to the conclusion that women have definitely become more accepted as mentors whose influence has transcended the screen and page from where they came.

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