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H World Literature

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CPAS Section Two: Final Thesis

CPAS/Critical Lens Quote: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” (King Jr)

In every person's life, there comes a time when he or she asks themselves what they are, what they mean, even who they are. Many find that these questions will come up after they have experienced something so profound as to cause them to have an epiphany. There is no test truer, or more meaningful, than the threat of death upon a man's life, both to him or some object or person he loves. As such, one does not know the “ultimate measure” of a man until he or she has seen him stressed with life or death decisions. All this discussion about “ultimate measures” generally infers such themes as man vs. society, man vs. man, courage, love, and even the ultimate question, the meaning of life.

Though to many, the Harry Potter series is just another product of an author's imagination, a character to inhabit a story in a world of fantasy, there seems to be an underlying message in each and every novel. In every one of the seven novels, the great finale has Potter pushed to his limits as he battles the forces of evil in a fight for his life. In sequence, he first finds himself battling a semi-possessed professor, controlled by Potter's mortal enemy, Voldemort. In the second book, Voldemort returns to strike again, only this time in the form of a diary in a teenage incarnation. In the third book, Potter meets his long-lost godfather, but must

face the soul-eaters of Azkaban. Through the last four novels, again, Harry is faced with Voldemort as a culmination of events and Potter must prove his loyalty, love, and strength in order to protect his friends and family. "For neither shall live while the other survives" (Rowling) is the crucial, defining statement which continually challenges Harry Potter to reestablish his devotion to his friends and family.

On October 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1993, 160 soldiers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force were flown into the crowded Bakara Market on a daylight raid in an attempt to capture top terrorist officials. Within the first hour, everything went wrong. A MH-60 Blackhawk, a symbol of America's supreme military power, was shot down with a simple unguided RPG, and thus the tragedy of Black Hawk Down unfolded. The 160 military personnel found themselves fighting for their lives for over fifteen hours. In one situation, medic Tim Wilkinson was faced with crossing Marehan Road, which was at the time, covered by a seemingly solid barrier of bullets and RPG's. "He ran across, again moving at what seemed like tortoise pace, and again arriving unscathed" (Bowden 222) describes his actions as he placed his own life on the line, crossing the road three times in order to perform his duty as a medic for the troops and give aid. To put the situation in perspective, a Delta soldier said in comment to Wilkinson's crossings, "Man, God really does love medics" (Bowden 222). Dozens attempted similar feats that day, trying and failing to cross streets so filled with flying lead and explosives that the street appeared to have a solid wall in it. Few made as many crossings without being wounded.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a man of courage, integrity, and devotion. Even when faced with the threats of white supremacists, he stood his ground against segregation. Even though he was eventually assassinated, his dream was carried on. Today, whites and African Americans alike share anything and everything in the United States of America. The above quote is the

perfect summary of King's condition. Martin Luther King Jr. is today, admired among the greatest men in America for his part in uniting the states of our country. Without the "ultimate measure" of Martin Luther King Jr., our country would not be as strong as it is today, unified under one flag, one name, and one heart.

In times of hardship, pain, and poverty, the purity and strength in people are truly brought out. When a man risks his life to save another, his "true" nature is shown. After Hurricane Katrina, US Coast Guard helicopters alone, flew hundreds of missions over hurricane ravaged territory and saved more than twelve thousand people from rising floodwaters. Throughout the country, they were praised for their heroics. They were put to the test of round-the-clock highly stressful and dangerous missions flying through urban areas, dodging power lines, and at the same time, saving lives; yet, they prevailed. Today, over 30,000 people owe their lives to the air and marine forces of the United States Coast Guard, the men and women who pushed themselves past the point of exhaustion to bring people out of the disaster zone.

A man in a car crash finds himself bleeding profusely, yet miraculously alive after being thrown from his car. His wife, however, is still trapped within the car which is beginning to burn. The man has several choices. He can run for help, act helpless, or be the help. Decisions like these in similar situations bring a profound sense of understanding of a man or woman's personality and true self. Another common example is a soldier's first experience in the battlefield. He and his squad find themselves walking into an ambush. On the one hand, the soldier may have been the toughest, hardest man in training, but faced with the blazing guns of a real enemy, he may cower in fright behind a rock. On the other hand, the soldier who just barely made the cut might find himself leading the charge and saving the lives of his entire squad. There

is no way to tell until said man is faced with an experience so intense, as to change his view on life.

Many a person has heard the saying “don't count your eggs before they hatch”. This can be analogized to the judgment of men. A man might look ugly, dumb, nerdy, jock-like, perfect, horrible, handsome, or downright ugly, but one has no way of knowing if their appearance reflects their personality simply by looking at them, as an inanimate object in a single moment of time. Even then, if the person finds themselves in their “zone”, one may not see their true personality. However, in times of crisis and conflict, men rise up and react and act accordingly. The “nerd” may take the “jock's” place and lead the mob to success or safety, while the jock may find himself shrinking back either in fright or nervousness. The fact of the matter is that no one, not even the reader can judge themselves simply through their everyday actions.