large, silver eyes. Slowly it bowed its antlered head. And Harry realized... 'Prongs,' he whispered... it vanished. (p. 411-12)

James Potter was a specially trained "animagi," a wizard who was able to transform at will into an animal. His animal self is Prongs, a stag. Sirius Black, also an animagi, can shift into Padfoot, the black dog. They were two of the original Magical Marauders, the source of the Map given to Harry. But James Potters' choice of the stag form to preserve himself deserves comment. The stag has archaic symbolic links to the Tree of Life due to the resemblance of its antlers to the cyclic life of branches. It is also seen as the forerunner of daylight or guide to the light of the Sun; it is a harbinger of supreme consciousness. In alchemy the cervus fugitivus, the fugitive stag, is often the name for the highly elusive, metamorphosing Spirit Mercurius. (Mark Haeffner, Dictionary of Alchemy, London, Aquarian, 1991, p. 142) Jung said that "the secret of Merlin was carried on by alchemy, primarily in the figure of Mercurius." (C. G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, New York, Vintage Books, 1961, p. 228)

Like the shaman who aligns with special animals, Harry connects with his father's animagi, animal spirit and it gives him new strength to fight against the takeover and loss of his soul. A stunned Harry tells Dumbledore that the Patronus couldn't have been his father, because his father is dead.

You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? You father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him. How else could you produce that particular Patronus? Prongs rode again last night... You know Harry, in a way, you did see your father last night... You found him in yourself. (p. 427-428)

Like the babe in the manger to whom the Magi brought their gifts, Harry at Hogwarts is saved by the animagi. The chthonic encounter with his paternal authority in his 13th year pushes Harry over a new threshold of initiation.

A DIABOLIC CONJUNCTIO

Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire, the recently published fourth volume of the series, is Rowling's olympic showcase for Harry and his magical talents. In relation to what has come before, everything in this 734 page magnum opus is more elaborated. Two major international events, the Quidditch World Cup and the Triwizard Tournament, add external pressures (and new imported contents) to the expanding Hogwarts vessel. Surprise operations and plot twists crystallize deeper courage as well as blacker magic. Although Harry's ostensible goal through the maze of the three tasks set for him in this installment of his initiation is the Goblet of Fire, even that, once attained is but an auxiliary support on his way to the Holy Grail.

Making their developmental leap as fourteen year olds, Harry and Hermione move though the story with heightened maturity and understanding. While Harry does show interest in another girl (only to become tongue-tied), he is mostly vigilant, concentrating on his need to survive if his journey is to continue. His compassion and affection has
grown for Ron, and his integrity with rival Quidditch player Cedric is inspiring.

Hermione, ever an anima and tutelary figure, wisely guides Harry while confidently grappling with powerful energies of her own. She, too, is learning compassion: she actively imagines ways of helping Harry as well as the House Elves, the slaves traditionally assigned to wizards. Most Hogwartsians believe the Elves are happy with their lot, but Hermione sees their need for liberation and civil rights. Her social consciousness stems from a mixture of exquisite sensitivity to unfair treatment and identification with a group that mirrors her own outcast status, as a witch in a Muggle family. Her special psychic gifts feed a thinking that is becoming a trusted road map for Harry.

The connection between Harry and Voldemort has been a leitmotif in the series thus far. While the orphan and the dark magician are opposed moral personalities, living on reverse sides of the mirror, in this story their shared traits are becoming more obvious and provocative. Both figures have Muggle heritage, are orphans who have been exiled, are seen by others as saviors, and have wands with a tail feather taken from Dumbledore's magical phoenix. The kinship between good and evil is as palpable as the scar on Harry's forehead that throbs whenever Lord Voldemort is near or contemplating murderous thoughts. "Good qualities that are contrary to instinct cannot last, but neither can evil when its one-sided demonism runs counter to instinct." (von Franz, 1994, p. 89) Author Rowling compels us to participate in a meditation on good and evil as two sides of the heroic coin.

Dark action jump-starts the tale: with a reverberating jolt, Harry awakens from a nightmare in which he knows that Voldemort has returned and that he and his servant Wormtail are plotting to kill him. Harry's trust in his psychic abilities is growing and he accepts the reality that the dream presents.

Throughout the tale, Voldemort, an extraverted intuitive schemer, is shadowing the introverted intuitive Harry. As these two aspects of intuition engage, the reality is shifting all over the narrative, as new rooms open up in every direction and dimension. The dark force becomes stronger as "Death Eater" Voldemort supporters appear with black marks branded on their left forearms, openly pushing for ethnic cleansing of the mixed-blood wizards. The history of family feuds among generations of wizards, their closets filled with ghosts, suddenly erupts into plain view. Political intrigues and power struggles intensify at the Ministry of Magic as they are in denial about Voldemort's return. Only Headmaster Dumbledore doesn't talk about ending the encroaching evil; since he knows it will always exist, he has the attitude that we need to see it, call it by name, and meet it. He is conscious of his own shadow and does not distance it by projecting it onto others. We are given an insight into the source of such wisdom: Dumbledore has a magical apparatus, an enviable "projective" device called the "Pensieve," into which he can siphon out his overflow thoughts and memories into a vessel and reflect on them in 3D form. Harry finds it by noticing a silvery patch of light while waiting in the Professors office to tell him an ominous dream.

A shallow stone basin lay there, with odd carvings around the edge: runes
and symbols that Harry did not recognize. [It was filled with a silvery liquid or gas moving like water or clouds, and Dumbledore says to him] It becomes easier to spot patterns and links...when they are in this form...Dumbledore placed his long hands on either side of the Pensieve and swirled it, rather as a gold prospector would pan for fragments of gold... (Goblet of Fire, p. 583, 597)

Meanwhile the students at Hogwarts get a lesson in the morality of magical power when they learn about casting spells including the three "Unforgivable Curses" that should never be used against other humans. The penalty for use is a Azkaban life sentence. The dark arts curses are: Imperius, which gives total control over another and may be reversed only by someone with great strength of character, Crucius gives one the ability to torture another, and Avada Kedavra, gives a wizard the power to kill another. Harry is the only person ever known to have survived the death curse.

Finally all roads in Hogwarts converge on the Triwizard Tournament in which four contestants will compete. There are three symbolic tasks which involve a terrifying encounter with a Dragon whose egg must be stolen, an icy plunge into the dark waters of Lake Hogwarts where the competitor must retrieve what is most important to him, and a passage through a maze in which the adept must concentrate on the essence of everything he has learned in order to survive. Harry completes all three tasks with the same unerring spirit of integrity that has accompanied him in his wizardly eduction thus far--a relational, intuitive, urgent way--never taking the traditional road to sensation prowess of the conventional hero.

Ready to reach out to the Goblet of Fire prize, Harry is tricked. He falls into a hellish fourth dimensional abyss and lands in a darkened graveyard. A hooded man is carrying a bundle or a baby:

Harry had never seen anything less like a child. It was hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black. It arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face--no child alive ever had a face like that--flat and snakelike, with gleaming red eyes. (Goblet of Fire, p. 640)

Harry quickly realizes that this demonic inversion of the divine child is the living remains of Lord Voldemort. The Dark Lord has finally trapped his Hogwarts student rival. Voldemort now makes his mercurial plan clear which is to arrange to mix a brew of these remains of himself, Harry and two additional substances to achieve a full reincarnation. A huge steaming cauldron appears. The wizard submerges his putrefied child remains in the alchemical bath as the first body in a perverse coagulatio. Amidst bizarre magical chants the dark trickster creates a diabolic conjunctio of something old (Voldemort's father's bones,) something new (Harry's blood,) something borrowed (his apprentice Wormtail's arm,) and something Blue (the color of the poisonous water.) Like the Savior he believes himself to be, the incarnated Voldemort has shifted shapes and rises out of the steaming vapors. Alchemical Black Magic has created the demonic side of a dual-natured tricksterish Mercury.

Unlike the royal marriage of the King and Queen in the Rosarium Philosophorum "where love plays the decisive part," here power rules: the
The alchemical "sublimatio is an elevating process whereby a low substance is translated into a higher form by an ascending movement." (Edinger, 1985, p. 117) As Harry duels with this incarnation of evil, psychologically he confronts his shadowy projection and moves towards greater integration and wholeness. In the heat of the battle, Harry actively concentrates the power he needs to regain the advantage over Voldemort. Beads of light travel down his wand towards Voldemort. Screams come from inside Voldemort's wand as smokey ghosts of people he has slaughtered are regurgitated from its tip. The victims call to Harry, encouraging him to keep fighting, hold the connection, and to not let go. Finally, images of Harry's father and then his mother come forth, eager to support him and tell him how to escape. They distract Voldemort and Harry makes a run for it, magically finding his way to Hogwarts. For the first time in such a process he does not dissociate, fall into unconsciousness, or need Dumbledore to save him. Harry stays present and uses his intuitive powers to save himself.

The episode allows the readers to gain a better sense of Voldemort's character. Propelled by compulsion and a vengeful vampiric nature, he so desires blood from his foe that he cannot reflect on the meaning of having received Harry's essence into himself, or on the significance of using wands that are of the same core. He completely misses the deeper connection between him and Harry. As in the earlier stories, Voldemort gets taken by surprises that derive from his adversary's essential similarity to him; he is a trickster tricked by his own tricks. And so, instead of the Philosopher's Stone, he finds fool's gold and the fleeting illusion of power.

But unconsciously there does seem to be a motivation in Voldemort wanting to bring a piece of Harry into himself, as the filius regius of alchemy, the royal son who will force him to connect with the light of the Sun—and the new consciousness where masculine and feminine are united. As we wonder how Harry's blood will affect Voldemort, we might consider Donald Kalsched's discussion of Bluebeard in the fairy tale who gave each of his wives an egg with the instruction to preserve it at all costs and not to let any harm come to it...The egg is an image of potential life—of the Self....The wife represents something he wants....[That the] wizard has given the egg...to her suggests that the wizard wants to be transformed also. Ultimately, the wizard wants his inflated power to be seen through, which will force him to become the human being that he wants to be instead of being the isolated wizard.

On the other hand, Kalsched warns us:

It's as though the people who stand for wholeness and integration of the opposites are a terrifying, devastating threat to people whose psychic economies require projection. (Kalsched, interview by Anne Malone, for www.CGJUNGPAGE.ORG, n.d.)

Of all the characters we have met in the series, Head Master Dumbledore has attained the highest degree of psychological integration. He is conscious of his shadow and his suffering and does not need to project or demonize the dark characters (like the ex-Death Eater and Potions teacher, Severus Snape or the residents of Slytherin House.) He has, and encourages, a relationship with them. "Time is short, and unless the few of us who know the truth do not stand united, there is no hope for any of us.... Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open. (p. 712,723) However, Wizard Dumbledore knows from his past experience the danger of Lord Voldemort whose only interest is Power.

HARRY POTTER AS A CONTEMPORARY SHAMAN

The global attraction to Harry Potter is due to many forces. Of central importance is J.K. Rowling's unique and clear writing style. She presents a modern fairy tale, replete with compelling archetypal themes, about the ancient rites of initiation with an angle that stays close to the reality of the actual child, yet also intersects with core imaginal needs of the adult's inner child. Children and adults read the books together. Rowling gives enough detail to establish place and character, spins a terrific story, then plunges the reader into a multi-dimensional imaginative world that glows with the best of literature and cyberspace.

Nearly fifty years ago The Little Prince magically appeared from the "other side" to Antoine de Saint-Exupery. Like Harry Potter, the book touched into the archetypal world and attracted a diverse audience. P.L. Travers, author of Mary Poppins, detected the three essentials required by children's books. It is true in the most inward sense, it offers no explanations, and it has a moral... 'what is essential is invisible to the eye.'...she surmised that The Little Prince will shine upon children with a sidewise gleam. It will strike them in some place that is not the mind and glow there until the time comes for them to comprehend it.(Program note. Exhibition of Saint-Exupery's Manuscripts and Drawings for The Little Prince. The Morgan Library. New York. June 2000)

As someone who is interested in the cultural unconscious and socio-cultural trends, additional questions occur. What is the coincidence of these particular archetypal characters in the Harry Potter stories with the millennial timing of the books' release? What is it about the conscious situation on the planet that may be compensated by this story? The Harry Potter books have consistently held the top slots on the New York Times Book Review Best Sellers List for two years, have been translated into forty languages and published in one hundred fifteen countries, in addition to being an unprecedented publishing phenomenon.

Jung argued that when an archetype is activated in a group's collective psyche, the images of its energy will appear in the group's stories, myths,
and folktales. He further believed that any story that has spread across
oceans and the millennia has done so only because it speaks to a
psychological experience that is common to us all. (Hort, p. 6) The
psychological climate in much of the rapidly changing technological
world is one of spiritual depletion, emotional alienation and personal isolation.
Perhaps one secret of Harry Potter's success is that this story of a tribe of
three kids who struggle together and fight to defend their personal spirits
from soul-sucking demonic forces, is feeding a profound soul hunger in the
people around them. Harry and his friends represent a new image of human
cooperation and hope required for redemptive healing. Jung wrote in Mysterium Coniunctionis:

The ultimate fate of every dogma is that it gradually becomes
soulless. Life wants to create new forms, and therefore, when
a dogma loses its vitality, it must perforce activate the
archetype that has always helped man to express the mystery
of the soul...the psychic archetype makes it possible for the
divine figure to take form and become accessible to
understanding. (Collected Works, Vol. 14, p. 347, par. 488)

The archetypal battle between the young Orphan and ancient Vampire is
the life and death struggle of opposites that allows for the birth of a new
divine figure. Harry Potter is an image of creative resilient energy
characterized by qualities that will be refined in the seven volumes along the
Hogwarts journey: emotional empathy, discernment, compassion and
empowerment.

The archetype of the Vampire has caught people's imagination for centuries.
This dark theme powerfully connects the forces of doom in the books,
pointing to similar virulent features in the demonic faces of Lord Voldemort,
Tom Riddle, and the Dementors. All three are able to possess their victims,
are not truly embodied, and need the spirit of their victim to survive. Harry
on the other hand, lives in the link between the two worlds of good and evil.
Voldemort infected the boy during the murder of his parents and his "bite"
transfused some dark wizard attributes into the infant. As Dumbledore tells
him, it is his choices, rather than his abilities, that will determine his future.

In The Problem of Evil in Fairy Tales, von Franz highlights wicked
figures that seem to personify evil because they are "especially gruesome,
taking the form of utter heartlessness...[the evildoer is invulnerable] because
his heart is not in his body." (Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche,
Boston, Shambhala, 1997, p. 87) A Jungian way of saying this is to insist
that Harry must get to know his shadow complex well, endure the forces
within, so that he can consciously follow the Griffin rather than blindly be
bitten by the slithering serpent from behind. Staying close to his retrieved
instincts, his heart, and valuing his feeling will be his life preservers.

The orphan belongs to the alchemical symbolism of separatio, since an
orphan is one who is separated out, unparented, out of connection, and the
one who must stand alone without being nursed. Jung's words on the Stone
in Bollingen were: "I am an orphan, alone; nevertheless I am found
everywhere. I am one, but opposed to myself. I am youth and old man at
one and the same time...." (Jung, 1961, p. 227). This standing alone is part
of the process of becoming an individual, and becoming "individuated."
Initiation is the period of aloneness, when one is alone in the liminal space.
In each book's climactic ending, Harry is separated from his tribal group and must struggle alone. It is during these most intense ordeals that an old aspect dissolves and some new quality is formed in an alchemical coagulatio.

Ultimately, what is created inside of Harry is new psychic energy. He is becoming the container for a new, emerging vision for the future. Von Franz, in her seminal work, Puer Aetemus, writes of the youths who have a "certain kind of spirituality which comes from a relatively close contact with the collective unconscious...they do not like conventional situations; they ask deep questions and go straight for the truth.... "(Sigo Press, 1981, p. 4)

Marion Woodman adds that this type of authentic masculinity is interested in genuine empowerment grounded in the instincts... Men and women have to honor this young man in themselves.... the discovery of the creative masculine involves dream sequences that swing from encounters with intense light or swift winds to equally powerful encounters with chthonic passion. Woodman, 1990, p. 204)

The world's identification with the image of Harry Potter points to the formation of a new archetype of the young masculine that is distinct from established patriarchal values. This vibrant boy who has been wounded by severe trauma, shows human scale emotions and values doing the right thing. However, Harry becomes neither inflated by his successes nor has the fantasy of immortality. He inhabits a paradoxical alchemical world and unlike other magical boys, such as Peter Pan and the Little Prince, he has been infected with evil and must be mindful of that inoculation.

Harry's early relationships are appropriate for his stage of adolescent development and have to do with strengthening his masculine identity and authority. His feminine connections however, are beginning to work on him, steering him from below. Glimpses of his budding anima and unconscious relationship with the feminine are seen in how wrenched he becomes when he hears the screams of his dead mother, that sometimes he needs Hermione to act as a crossing guard when he is unable to contain his wildness, and how Headmistress McGonagall introduces him to his body and special physical abilities when she chooses him for the Quidditch team.

Perhaps Harry Potter's fans constitute a generation across age lines that feels somewhat orphaned and unprotected and along with Harry, know the despair of spiritual emptiness and emotional starvation. It is only because of his near death encounters with Voldemort and the proximity to a force that can crush or devour, that Harry is forced to find his true sources of spiritual power and strength. Therefore, he represents embodiment and resilience in a world that represses the spirit. Harry Potter is an inspiring vision of a contemporary Western shaman with whom a hope lies that he will show us how to retrieve lost soul.

At this mid-point in the book series, it has become evident that evil is what harms life. What saves it? J.K. Rowling's answer throughout these stories about the initiation of wizards, is an educated, embodied intuition. The Animagi are the most gifted of the wizards and have the ability to transfigure into animals. Rowling implies that intuition is an animal instinct that can be brought out in the work of shamanic education Harry is able to find at Hogwarts. Why does having the animal instinct with one, incline one to
good? Rowling is clear that it pays to trust the self, and that the "self" is a progressive undertaking of one's own personal power. Evil for her seems to be a form of unconsciousness.

Consciousness, of the kind Harry is developing, leads to greater integrity and compassion. This is an exciting urgent series for the children of our time, who will be called upon as never before to open themselves to their spiritual and somatic capacities if they are to overcome the challenges placed in the way of their survival, in a world so threatened by greed and the power drive as our own. If the fallout of ego-chemistry is a melting ice cap on the North Pole, perhaps J.K. Rowling's alchemy is the right antidote for our present inability to listen to our true natures.

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Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of the Ordinary

Roni Natov

I like the Harry Potter books because they are like real life but more interesting.

—Melissa Stevens, 14

Harry is like a real boy—except that he’s a wizard!

—Sarah McKenna, 10

Harry begins his journey at eleven years old, an age associated with coming into consciousness, particularly for boys, and particularly in England, when children begin their “serious” study to prepare them for adult life. What Harry discovers on his eleventh birthday is that he is a wizard, that he has powers he intuits but, as is true of childhood knowledge, does not consciously recognize. He had noticed that strange things happened to him: his hair grew back overnight after his aunt sheared it off; the sweater she tried to force him to wear kept getting smaller when she tried to pull it over his head. A most hilarious scene occurs at the zoo where the caged boa winks at him, after sleeping through his cousin Dudley’s command to “Make it move,” and, as it makes its escape amid “howls of horror,” Harry “could have sworn a low hissing voice said, ‘Brazil, here I come. . . . Thankss, amigo’” (Sorcerer’s Stone 28). He does not connect these events with his own power. Like most orphans, Harry has little sense of having any power at all.

Like most orphan heroes, he will need to be unusually sensitive, almost vigilant, particularly since he has been raised by hostile relatives against whom his sensibility absolutely grates. He has to make his own choices, as Rowling pointed out in a National Public Radio (NPR) interview, without the benefit of “access to adults,” the “safety net of many children who have loving parents or guardians.”

However extreme this situation, it only epitomizes what I believe at one time every child feels—that she is on her own, unacknowledged, unappreciated, unseen, and unheard, up against an unfair parent, and by extension, an unfair world. Justice and the lack of it reign supreme in the literature of childhood, where our first sense of the world is often so astutely recorded. “But it’s not fair!” is a phrase that stands out from my childhood and continues to resonate for me even now. I am reminded of E. B. White’s opening to the beloved classic, Charlotte’s Web: “‘Where’s Poppa going with that axe?’” White’s hero, Fern, protests against the adults’ Darwinian treatment of animals, those creatures closest to her child-sensibility: “‘But it’s unfair! . . . The pig couldn’t help being born small. . . . If I had been very small at birth,’” she accuses, “‘would you have killed me?’” (3).

And what could be more unfair than losing your parents as a baby? The orphan archetype embodies the childhood task of learning to deal with an unfair world. I am also reminded of Jane Eyre at ten years old, thrusting around in her awareness of her unjust treatment at the hands of her aunt and cousins. Harry, like his great Victorian predecessors, is a kind of Everychild, vulnerable in his powerlessness, but as he discovers his strengths, he releases a new source of vitality into the world. He becomes the child-hero of his own story, like Dickens’s “favorite child,” the orphan hero of David Copperfield, whose story begins, “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (1). The Harry Potter stories chronicle the process of the child’s movement from the initial consciousness of himself as the central character in his story, a singular preoccupation with self, to a sense of his own power and responsibility to a larger community.

Harry Potter has been raised by the Dursleys, who pride themselves on being “perfectly normal” (Sorcerer’s Stone 1)—a sign that this story will assert the unconventional, even the eccentric. Harry will provide a resistance to normality that, Rowling suggests, is necessary for inclusiveness, for the individual and the community to prosper. Mr. Dursley, director of Grunnings, which makes drills, is a brutal, “beefy man with hardly any neck” (1). His equally nasty opposite, Mrs. Dursley, is “thin . . . [with] nearly twice the usual amount of neck . . . [good for] spying on the neighbors” (1). These are the caretakers of “the boy who lived” through childhood and into adulthood.
the murder of both his parents and the attempt on his own life. Many are the injustices heaped upon him: he is kept under the stairs, half-starved and half-clothed, is "small and skinny for his age . . . [his] "glasses held together with a lot of Scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose" (20). The Dursleys are also psychologically abusive and provide, conversely, a model of how not to treat children. They treat Harry "as though he wasn't there . . . as though he was something very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug" (22). They withhold the truth of Harry's birth, in violation of a basic tenet of children's rights—one of the many indications that Rowling sees children as people with rights. What they hate in Harry's behavior, "even more than his asking questions [is] his talking about anything acting in a way it shouldn't, no matter if it was in a dream or even a cartoon" (26).

Here Rowling emphasizes the preeminence of the imagination of childhood and the need for children to question and dream. So when Harry dreams of a flying motorcycle, it foreshadows his success at Quidditch, a kind of soccer in the sky, and his imminent rise above the chains of conventionality. Normal, Muggle (non-magical) school is a system that teaches children to use "knobbly sticks for hitting each other . . . [as if it were] good training for later life" (32). There Harry is persecuted by Dudley's "normal" friends, like Piers, "a scrawny boy with a face like a rat . . . who held people's arms behind their backs while Dudley hit them" (23)—because he is different, because he is an orphan, because he is dressed in Dudley's old, shrunken uniforms, "looking like he was wearing bits of old elephant skin . . ." (35). Aside from his dark cupboard under the stairs, nowhere is Harry safe. And nowhere is he loved, which only provides the urgency for a compensatory endowment of magical powers.

Belying Harry's puny appearance and weak position in the Muggle world is his bolt-of-lightning scar, which marks him, like Cain, for difference and protection against antagonism to that uniqueness. When Harry is most vulnerable, his scar burns painfully, which serves to warn him against proximity of danger. A particularly touching image of Harry's vulnerability occurs at the end of the first chapter, where he is curled "like a small animal" in sleep, "not knowing he was special, not knowing he was famous . . . that at this very moment, people meeting in secret all over the country were holding up their glasses and saying in hushed voices: 'To Harry Potter—the boy who lived!' " (Sorcerer's Stone 17).

Harry embodies this state of injustice frequently experienced by children, often as inchoate fear and anger—and its other side, desire to possess extraordinary powers that will overcome such early and deep exile from the child's birthright of love and protection. That every child experiences himself as special is obvious, if for no other reason than that everything that happens to him is inherently significant. The world revolves around him; each moment resonates with the potential vitality of the first time, of unexplored territory. As the child grows into consciousness, an inner world serves to witness the extraordinary quality of experience recorded, sorted through, and reflected upon. Along with this consciousness comes the recognition that others may share that experience, in part at least, and that ultimately each child is just another human being on this large, multitudinous planet. I remember looking up at the stars one night in the country and coming to a sudden understanding that contained both terror and relief. My epiphany turned on how small and insignificant I was, coupled with the insight that I was not responsible for the world. I had only a small part to play; the world was long in the making before I entered it and would go on long after I was gone. I remember that my ordinariness, then, offered a perspective and put into sharp relief my need to be special.

The Harry Potter series opens with the infiltration of the ordinary world by the luminous and magical as "a large, tawny owl flutters past the window" unobserved by the blunted Dursleys. Mr. Dursley "noticed the first sign of something peculiar—a cat reading a map," but assumed that "[i]t must have been a trick of the light . . . and put the cat out of his mind" (Sorcerer's Stone 2–3). He was aware of "a lot of strangely dressed people . . . in cloaks. Mr. Dursley couldn't bear people who dressed in funny clothes . . . [and] was enraged to see that a couple of them weren't young at all," dismissed them as "people [who] were obviously collecting for something [and put] his mind back on drills" (3). He was oblivious to "the owls swooping past in broad daylight, though people down in the street . . . pointed and gazed open-mouthed as owl after owl sped overhead" (4). With this startling image of the nocturnal in bright light, Rowling establishes three groups defined by their response to the magic of the world. The Dursleys represent those who are hostile to anything imaginative, new, unpredictable. The Muggles, who notice the owls but are remote from their magical aura, represent a kind of conventional center. Professor Dumbledore, Head of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, an old man, whose silver hair and beard "were both long enough to tuck into his belt . . . [who wore] long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots" (8), and Professor McGonagall, who has shape-shifted from cat to woman, indicated by her glasses with "exactly the shape of the markings the cat had had around its eyes" (9), embody the childhood world of magic and awe.
In most popular children’s fantasies, the magical world is entirely separate from daily life. In C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, for example, entry into the supernatural takes place through a wardrobe at the back of a strange house during the bombings of World War II and represents the child-heroes’ escape into a reimagined and revitalized Christian realm. In Madeline L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time* and its successors, *A Wind in the Door* and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, the magical world is celestial, in keeping with science fiction and L’Engle’s strong religious allegorical allusions. J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy take place entirely in a magical world and represent a refuge, an alternative to the real world.

Rowling noted the genius of Lewis and Tolkien, those predecessors with whom she has been frequently compared, but she claimed in the NPR radio interview that she was “doing something slightly different.” Though her stories contain the usual global battle between the forces of good and evil, Rowling, I believe, is essentially a novelist, strongest when writing about the real world. Harry has a psychology; his problems need resolution in the real world. Insofar as he is a real child, with little relief at home, at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where the supernatural reigns, he is freer to discover his own powers. In Rowling’s stories, the interpenetration of the two worlds suggests the way in which we live, not only in childhood, though especially so—more than one plane, with the life of the imagination and daily life moving in and out of our consciousness. The two realms, characterized in literature as the genres of romance and realism, are located in the imagination, which is, always, created by and rooted in the details of everyday life. In fantasy, always we are grounded; the unconscious invents nothing, or as Freud put it, “In the psychic life, there is nothing arbitrary, nothing undetermined” (qtd. in Todorov 161). The realm of the fantastic, based on the unconscious, is firmly and inevitably a reconfiguration of everyday reality, transformed and disguised though it may be.

The need for both realms and their interdependence was recognized by Wordsworth and Coleridge in their plan for the *Lyrical Ballads*. As Coleridge noted:

> my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic—yet so as to transfer, from our inward nature, a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith... [Wordsworth was] to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us—an inexhaustible treasure but for which... we have eyes yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand. (*Biographia Literaria* 531)

In the *Harry Potter* books, magic calls attention to the awe and wonder of ordinary life. Rowling ingeniously enhances and amplifies the vitality of ordinary objects. For example, at Hogwarts, the walls are “covered with portraits of old headmasters and headmistresses, all of whom were snoozing gently in their frames” (*Chamber* 203). Books bite and argue, “locked together in furious wrestling matches and snapping aggressively” (*Prisoner* 52)—a literary joke about the Battle of the Books or other debate literature, reminiscent of Carroll’s *Wonderland* and *Looking Glass* landscapes. Along with magical wands, cloaks of invisibility, maps that reproduce and mirror actual journeys as they are taking place (like the virtual reality of technology), the things of children’s culture—treats such as candy, and kids’ own particular kind of humor, such as jokes about bodily fluids—are featured. Some of children readers’ favorite aspects of life at Hogwarts include Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans, consisting of such flavors as spinach, liver, tripe, grass, sardine, vomit, ear wax, and “even a booger-flavored one” (*Sorcerer* 104). Words themselves suggest the magical power of language to mean, as well as to evoke and connote. Such passwords as “pig snout,” “scurvy cur,” “oldsbodkin,” suggest treasure and mystery. The characters’ names are appropriately allusive and inviting. As Moore points out:

> There are sneaky-sounding s’s: Slytherins, Snape, Severus, Sirius and Scabbers. The h’s are kind of heroic: Hogwarts, Hedwig, Hermione and Hagrid. The f’s are often unpleasant types: Filch and Flitwick... The names that sound French are usually difficult people: Madam Pince, Madam Pomfrey, and Malfoy. (2)

Alison Lurie noted,

> As in many folk tales, you can often tell a character’s character from his or her name, and “Voldemort” neatly combines the ideas of theft, mold, and death. Harry Potter, on the other hand, has a name that suggests not only craftsmanship but both English literature and English history: Shakespeare’s Prince Hal and Harry Hotspur, the brave, charming, impulsive heroes of *Henry IV*, and Beatrix Potter, who created that other charming and impulsive classic hero, Peter Rabbit.

As Harry embodies both the ordinary and the extraordinary, his narratives contain realistic and romantic elements. Like other questing heroes, Harry must prove himself through a series of tests, each increasingly more difficult. Joseph Campbell noted how the hero’s cycle
corresponded to the dynamic movement through life stages, particularly the development of consciousness and the discovery of identity. Even the simplest of hero stories, the fairy tales, dramatize the complexity of the life struggles of everyman/woman/child. For example, both Perrault's and the Grimm's most virtuous, Christianized, and domesticated girl-hero, Cinderella, must revolt against the wishes of the good fairy godmother (without the consciousness that she is doing so, of course). She must forget to leave the ball by midnight, in order that the prince find her and that her rightful place be restored. This tale acknowledges the hero's paradoxical struggle to maintain tradition and to subvert it for evolution to occur. Some taboo must be broken, some boundary crossed—this is at the heart of the hero's quest. Harry, who is, as Alison Lurie points out, a kind of Cinderlad himself, must break the very rules at Hogwarts needed to maintain order and its basic values.

The fairy tales of childhood illustrate a most significant aspect of that earliest stage, the centrality of play and the imagination, which, though it receives prominence in childhood, often gets lost along the way to adulthood. Consider "Jack and the Beanstalk," in which the lazy child, Jack, refuses to do his mother's bidding and "forgets" to sell the cow for money but rather is enchanted by the magic beans. The tale asserts his right to journey into the sky (the world above the world) and solve the earth-bound adult problem of money by stealing the golden harp, hen, eggs—the means to achieving ever-regenerating money and power—precisely what he never could have gotten by selling the cow. Once having used up the modest sum he would have gotten from the cow, he would have had, inevitably, to go out again to market with whatever was left to sell, only to return home again with fewer resources, thus moving into the cycle of poverty—from which the poor often do not have the power to emerge, any more than children have the power to overcome the authority of adults. The magic beans in this story represent relief from the real problems that are quite beyond the child to solve but can be, as the story suggests, imagined. Magic embodies the imagination, stands in for what is beyond the power of children, perhaps anyone, to actualize. Often we can envision long before we can create the means to flee or resolve what feels overwhelming. This is particularly true for children.

Harry's supernatural powers invite children to imagine beyond the boundaries of their limitations: what if I could see and hear without being seen or heard; what if I could fly; what if I could read another's mind. With his magic cloak, Harry is invisible; with his Nimbus 2000 racing broomstick, he can fly; he can even, in the fourth book, project himself into Dumbledore's brain. Also, like every child, Harry is one among many, represented here by the fact that his classmates are also wizards. While he is good at playing Quidditch, he is just an ordinary player at his school work; nor is he particularly insightful in the way he relates to or understands others. His classmate Hermione Granger, the girl with whom Rowling most closely identifies, is smarter and more sensitive. Hermione has the most highly developed sense of justice; even though Harry has freed Dobby, the house-elf, Hermione alone understands the oppression of the house-elves, as they serve their masters without pay, "beaming, bowing, and curtsey" (Goblet 379). Part of Rowling's genius is the creation of stories about the development of the ordinary boy, as he grows from the start of the series at ten years old to the age of seventeen. There will be one book for each year, Rowling announced in December 1998, with the "hormones kicking in." Gender informs Rowling's vision in that she blends the male questor with the feminized hero of tales of school and home; these stories are relational, psychologically nuanced, and in that sense realistic.

During the NPR radio interview, a child called in to ask if Rowling could please bring back Harry's parents. Respectfully and sorrowfully, she said she regretted that she couldn't do that. "You can't bring dead people back," she said. She had to set limits on what magic could and couldn't do since it was important to her to keep these characters real. Even the magical ones are defined by their human as well as magical traits. The real world, then, becomes somewhat illuminated by these characters who can span both worlds. For example, teachers at Hogwarts can be imaginative and compassionate; they are also flighty, vindictive, dim-witted, indulgent, lazy, frightened and frightening. Students are clever, kind, weak, cruel, snobbish. Lessons are inspiring and tedious—as in the best and worst of real schools.

Harry's guide into the magical world of Hogwarts is Hagrid, a larger-than-life figure, the giant from the fairy tales of childhood, deliverer of the annunciation: "Yeh don't know what yeh are ... Harry—yer a wizard" (Sorcerer's Stone 50). He is "almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide ... simply too big to be allowed, and so wild—long tangles of bushy, black hair and beard hid most of his face ... [with] hands the size of trash can lids, and ... feet ... like baby dolphins" (Sorcerer's Stone 14). He is also careless, drinks too much, humanized by his sentimental and indulgent love for bizarre and grotesque creatures, such as the dragons and Blast-Ended Skrewts, who threaten the safety of Hogwarts. Even these creatures suggest the two sides of imaginative writing: dragons are recognizable as mythical fire-breathing creatures, although here Rowling makes them distinct, almost realistic.
The baby dragon flopped onto the table. It wasn't exactly pretty: Harry thought it looked like a crumpled, black umbrella. Its spiny wings were huge compared to its skinny jet body, it had a long snout with wide nostrils, the stubs of horns and bulging, orange eyes... (Sorcerer's Stone 235)

The Skrewts, slug-like and slimy, are also described in vivid detail, while their size mythicizes them. The movement here between these siblings, and Hermione, the racially mixed daughter of a Muggle and a wizard, are his best friends.

Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of the Ordinary

Rowling is adept at providing paradigms for thoughtful, courageous, and moral behavior for children, with clear explanations of the states of feeling that accompany the process. These deeper moments of reflection serve as pauses in the rapid pace of these page-turners. It seems to me that the best mysteries, adventure stories, and romances represent a negotiation between the relentless pace of the narrative breathlessly moving forward and the meditative pockets that provide the space and time to turn inward—to affirm our sense that something memorable is happening to us, something we can retrieve for later, after the book is ended. As is true of our best writers, Rowling draws these opposing realms so seamlessly that they appear to have always been there, side by side, the event and its meaning exquisitely illuminated.

In the first book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, the scene in which Harry comes upon the Mirror of Erised (thinly disguised so children will discover that it represents desire) and sees, for the first time in his life, his family, "he had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness" (209). How fascinating that his friend Ron sees only himself decked out as Head Boy, his own "deepest, most desperate desire" (213). Ron, whose strongest wish is to stand out from his five brothers and from Harry as well, assumes he is seeing the future, just as Harry believed he was looking into his past. However, this mirror, says Dumbledore, "will give us neither knowledge or truth" (213). It can drive us mad, "not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible." He

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warns against “dwell[ing] in dreams” as one could “forget to live.” However, he offers, “If you ever do run across it, you will now be prepared” (214). Rowling has, essentially, taken the great test of Odysseus, who must hear the song of the sirens but not act on that calling, and reimagined it for children. At its core, Rowling suggests, desire can be both alluring and dangerous. Children need to understand, on whatever level, its complexity. Rowling does not minimize childhood longing. She offers this small allegory with the understanding that the search for identity is reflected in that mirror—as Harry sees his family behind him and desires only to return again and again to that vision of himself, supported by those who resemble him, smiling at and waving to him. This scene prepares for the ones that follow, in which Harry comes into deeper and darker knowledge, though always returning to this central issue of identity and the protection it promises.

If the Mirror reflects what we most long for, it also evokes the fear that accompanies such desire and the loss that engendered it. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Rowling focuses on this fear, beginning with the bogports who take the shape of “whatever each of us most fears” (Prisoner 133). For Harry, as his Dark Arts teacher tells him, it is fear itself, embodied in the dementors, the prison guards of Azkaban. What tortures Harry is his overwhelming guilt and sorrow at his mother’s death. At the sight of these grey-hooded figures, Harry hears his mother’s desperate cries: “No, take me, kill me instead.” Haunted by her pain and guilty that she died to save him, Harry is drawn into intense ambivalence, which Rowling explains:

> Terrible though it was to hear his parents’ last moments replayed inside his head, these were the only times Harry had heard their voices since he was a very small child. “They’re dead,” he told himself sternly... “and listening to echoes of them won’t bring them back. You’d better get a grip on yourself if you want that Quidditch Cup.” (Prisoner 243)

The desire to be reunited with his parents, though natural and inevitable, serves as a warning, as with the Mirror, against remaining in the past, lost in memory or desire. Of course, in addition to exploring Harry’s inner demons, here Rowling connects despair with madness and suggests that it is the loss of hope that makes us demented, that promotes criminality and destroys the heart. The dementors, those who are supposed to guard prisoners, drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them. Get too near a dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. “[S]oul-less and evil... you’ll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life...” (Prisoner 36). They don’t need walls and water to keep the prisoners in, not when they’re all trapped inside their heads, incapable of a single cheerful thought. Most of them go mad within weeks. (Prisoner 188)

The antidote for such haunting is happy memories, those that make children feel safe, loved, confident, good about themselves. More than anything, a sense of self is exactly what Hagrid was denied in prison, as he tells Harry: “‘Yeh can’ really remember who yeh are after a while” (Prisoner 221). Knowing who you are is at the heart here, the development of the child’s consciousness, the narrative of Everychild—the right to knowledge and expression of self. Rowling has spoken about depression as the loss of hope, how it has been her enemy, and how it has informed her depiction of the dementors here. I remember fits of depression as a child, though without any name for that state of mind, it went unrecognized and was buried, along with the shame that accompanied all my unacknowledged feelings. As Sendak claimed, when he was called upon to defend his depictions of frightening monster-like figures in *Where the Wild Things Are*, most frightening to children is to dream their own figures of fear and find no analogue in anything they hear about or read. Children need to see their feelings, particularly the darkest ones, reflected in their stories. Mitigating the darkness of the fairy tales takes away their power to reassure children that they are not alone in their fearful imaginings, that they are shared and can be addressed.

As Harry gets older in the books, the emotional challenges become more complex, which Rowling attempts to help children understand. She has captured the familiar sense of childhood shame with the Howlers—loud, public scoldings sent by parents to humiliate and ultimately to control children. For example, Neville receives a letter in the audible form of his “grandmother’s voice, magically magnified to a hundred times its usual volume, shrieking about how he had brought shame on the whole family” (Prisoner 272). Such exposure is handled with a kind of empathic humor, reminiscent of Woody Allen’s adult projection of his mother’s face in the sky, publicly denouncing him, a metaphor of adult shame and its roots in childhood. This externalized projection mirrors Harry’s private, internal moments following his collapse at the sight of the dementors, when he “felt the beginnings of shame. Why had he gone to pieces like that, when no one else had?” (Prisoner 36). Shame separates us, makes us feel less than, different from others. This aspect of difference, Rowling demonstrates, is deadly. At times she handles it with the acceptance that comes from humor; at times, with a kind of respect that accompanies our most difficult emotional trials.
Children are also led beyond the simple concept of evil as purely bad guys whose struggles abound in the earlier books. With the third volume, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, what appears evil turns out to be a paradigmal figure. Lupin, who is a werewolf, a force of good that can be dangerous as well. Rowling's use of the werewolf as metaphor for the split self here is astute and in keeping with the earliest known Red Riding Hood variant in which rather than the wolf, the werewolf—a fusion of animal and human—tries to seduce the young girl (Zipes 2). What is most interesting here is that the potentially destructive part of the werewolf is humanized and offered with understanding. Rowling establishes his innocence and evokes compassion for him, as he tells his story, Lupin says, "I was a very small boy when I received the bite. My parents tried everything, but in those days there was no cure. . . . My transformations were terrible. It is very painful to turn into a werewolf. I was separated from humans to bite, so I bit and scratched myself instead" (Prisoner 352-53). As Lupin becomes a werewolf when he doesn't take his potion, madness and self-destructive impulses are depicted with a kind of psychological truth. Rowling attempts to humanize the demonic, rather than demonize the human.

The servants of evil are recognizable as frail humans who have grown large because they are adults who are out of control—what is often most terrifying to children. Peter Pettigrew, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, is "horrible to watch, like an oversized, balding baby, cowering on the floor" (374), and Voldemort, who represents the generating power of evil, the force of discord and enmity, bears the shape of a crouched human child, except Harry had never seen anything less like a child. It was hairless and scaly-looking. . . . Its arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face—no child alive ever had a face like that. . . . The thing seemed almost helpless; it raised its thin arms, put them around Wormtail's neck, and Wormtail lifted it" (640-41). The infantile adult, a kind of perverted innocence, childish without anything childlike, is most horrifying when, as a child, it is the controlling force of your life.

How children take control of their lives—most crucial and central here—is metaphorically represented in several ways. Harry and Hermione watch themselves in "a Time-Turner," able to replay an event, to be in more than one place at a time, to go back in time while remaining in the present, to redo their mistakes and save the lovely hippogriff, Buckbeak. Harry tells Hermione, "I knew I could do it this time. . . . because I'd already done it. . . . Does that make sense?" (Prisoner 412)—expressing the paradoxical sense of knowing what we didn't know we knew. Even more psychologically profound is the way in which Rowling demonstrates what can be retrieved, even in the final loss of the death of a parent. To protect himself from fear, Harry conjures up a "Patronus," an image of his father. As an orphan, Harry will have to provide for himself the father he has never known. Here is a kind of child vision of father atonement. Dumbledore, in such a vision as a father figure, tells Harry: "You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry. . . . you did see [him] last night. . . . You found him inside yourself" (Prisoner 427-28).

This scene represents the only real consolation as well as a possible direction for healing such an early fracture. There are many father/son atonement scenes. Most awful is Mr. Crouch's son, rejected by his father, even as he stands before him, pleading in his innocence, "Father! Father, I wasn't involved! . . . I'm your son! . . . I'm your son!" (Goblet 596). We are not surprised that, in his confusion and despair, he becomes a servant of evil. Rowling also helps children to understand how Neville's parents, who have been "tortured for information about Voldemort's whereabouts" (Goblet 602), go insane, and so, though they are alive, when Neville visits them with his grandmother, they do not recognize him. Harry is more fortunate than the others in that he has been able to retrieve something, a touchstone for protection he can carry with him, although he has never had access to his parents. But it is not enough in his state of privilege to be isolated from the misfortune of others. Harry feels for Crouch's son, as images of the pale-faced boy swim up to him from his imagination. His compassion extends to Neville too, as he imagines how it must feel "to have parents still living but unable to recognize you" (Goblet 607).

The *Harry Potter* stories center on what children need to find internally—the strength to do the right thing, to establish a moral code. As hero, Harry must go beyond the apparent truth of things and, ultimately, learn to trust what he sees and act on what is right. The tournament of the fourth volume, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, departs from the rather simple victory of Quidditch tournaments, where one house at Hogwarts beats the others, Harry serving as Seeker, the primary position, for Gryffindor. In this book, as Hermione points out, "This whole tournament's supposed to be about getting to know foreign wizards and making friends with them." Although Ron with partial truth responds, "No it isn't. It's about winning!" (423), more is at stake here. The community is larger, more global. What it means to "win" is interrogated. In an expansive leap of feeling, Harry saves his rivals,
along with his friends. Voices tell him: "Your task is to retrieve your own friend ... leave the others ..." (493). He wonders, "Why hadn't he just grabbed Ron and gone? He would have been first back ... Cedric and Krum hadn't wasted time worrying about anyone else ..." (505). In response, he resists such individualism with "an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Differences of habit and language are nothing at all." Dumbledore tells him, "If our aims are identical and our hearts are open." (723). Harry and his closest rival, Cedric (who took Cho Chang, the object of Harry's desire, to the ball) help and support each other, and finally decide to reach the Cup at the same time, thus producing two winners. While Cedric dies, and thus Harry alone bears the reward, the boys' rejection of the school's either/or policy estabishes a new paradigm of sharing, building community, and inclusiveness.

Sharing thoughts and passing on experience is brilliantly depicted in the Pensieve, a basin that holds thoughts. "I sometimes find," Dumbledore tells Harry, "that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind. . . . At these times, I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one's mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them at one's leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links . . . when they are in this form" (Goble 597). Harry is literally drawn through a substance that was either "liquid or gas . . . a bright, white silver . . . moving ceaselessly; the surface of it became ruffled like water beneath wind, and then, like clouds, separated and swirled smoothly. It looked like light made liquid—or like wind made solid . . ." (Goble 583). To understand another's history, one must enter into a liminal state; one must move beyond the established boundaries of self and other, represented by the indistinguishable states of matter. In book two, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, Harry had fallen "through a page in an enchanted diary, right into someone else's memory" (Chamber 586). But here in The Goblet of Fire, the idea is more developed. Thought is depicted as tangible, progressive, dynamic—a series of landscapes to be visited, returned to, and discovered as patterns of meaning. Harry falls through Dumbledore's thoughts about his past, the subjectivity of memory extended to history. When he lands in the courtroom of Dumbledore's memory, "not one of [the adults] noticed that a fourteen-year-old boy had just dropped from the ceiling . . ." (Goble 585), reminiscent of Aiden's Icarus, who falls unnoticed out of the sky. But unlike Icarus, who, in his youthful optimism, flew too high so his wings melted from the heat of the sun, Harry's fall is a descent into consciousness; and rather than cautionary, it is visionary. It suggests connection, that we can participate in another's experience, explore another's past, albeit only through the subjectivity of our own vision.

Even the child, without the experience of the adult, without perspective afforded by hindsight, can glean something valuable from the lessons of the past—not those set in stone to be received unquestioningly but to make meaning of, the way Harry must make sense of the events he witnesses. In this scene of Dumbledore's younger days, Harry first notices how Dumbledore has aged, a perspective that reveals Harry's developing consciousness of time. Each person carries a unique history, some of which can be shared, as when Dumbledore joins Harry in reviewing his thoughts.

Even the idea of reviewing thoughts supports the value of interrogation and reflection. Surely this runs counter to what we are currently being told by television, video games, fast-paced cutting images of MTV, and the superficial content of pulp fiction. The Harry Potter books satirize for children the superficiality of this world, its pretenses and human failures, the narcissism of popular culture, the stupidity and cruelty of the press, the rigidity and fraudulence embedded in our institutions, particularly the schools, framed by the unrelenting snobbery and elitism of our social world. The unprecedented popularity of the Harry Potter stories, not only with sophisticated readers of a wide range of ages, but with new readers, those who previously resisted reading, suggests that rather than flat, knee-jerk responses, children are capable of and drawn to complexity and reflection—accompanied by the spectacular—integrated, always, in the real and recognizable world it is the child's mission to negotiate and struggle through.

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Notes

1 Quoted in We Love Harry Potter!, ed. Sharon Moore, 17.

2 Suzanne Rahn speaks about E. Nesbit as the first children's book author to bring magic into our contemporary world, in which "the protagonists [are] ordinary children," Rediscoveries in Children's Literature, 145.

3 Rowling herself mentions E. Nesbit's The Story of the Treasure Seekers as particularly influential in her conception of the Harry Potter series.
The debate over Rowling's choice of a boy hero has been extensive. Christine Schoefer, for example, writes about "Harry Potter's girl trouble," where she claims that "[n]o girl is brilliantly heroic the way Harry is. No woman is experienced and wise like Professor Dumbledore... [that] the range of female personalities is so limited that neither women nor girls play on the side of evil [and that] Rowling depicts Hermione as] working hard to be accepted by Harry and his sidekick Ron, who treat her like a tag-along until Volume 3" ("Harry Potter's Girl Trouble"). Along with her many supporters, Rowling complains, "What irritates me is that I am constantly, increasingly, being asked 'Can we have a strong female character, please?' Like they are ordering a side order of chips. I am thinking 'Isn't Hermione strong enough for you?' She is the most brilliant of the three and they need her... But my hero is a boy and at the age [11] he has been girls simply do not figure that much... I think it would be extremely contrived to throw in a couple of feisty, gorgeous, brilliant-at-math and great-at-fixing-cars girls" ("Harry and Me").

Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, 103-11.

a "Harry and Me," where Rowling described the dementors as "a description of depression... entirely from my own experience. Depression is the most unpleasant thing I have ever experienced... It is that absence of being able to envisage that you will ever be cheerful again. The absence of hope. That very deadened feeling, which is so very different from feeling sad. Sad hurts but it's a healthy feeling. It is a necessary thing to feel. Depression is very different."

b From an unpublished interview with Maurice Sendak conducted by Geraldine Deluca and me in 1977.

I recently talked to an eight-year-old who told me that her favorite character was Lupin, and when I asked her why, she said she felt sorry for him, because he was really good but couldn't help being bad sometimes.

Works Cited


Harry Potter’s Oedipal Issues

KELLY NOEL-SMITH, The Tavistock Clinic & University of East London

“Lily, take Harry and go! It’s Him! Go! Run! I’ll hold him off—“.
The sound of someone stumbling from a room—a door bursting open—a
cackle of high-pitched laughter.
“Not Harry! Not Harry! Please not Harry!”. 
“Stand aside, you silly girl ... stand aside, now ... “.
“Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead—Not Harry! Please ... have mercy ... have mercy”. (Rowling, 1999, pp. 134 and 178).

The Harry Potter books are extraordinarily successful. In May 2000, each of the first three books by J. K. Rowling occupied a place within the top five of The Times’ best-sellers’ list. The first edition of the fourth book, published in July 2000, was the largest ever for children’s books: a million hard-back copies being published in the UK and 3.8 million in the US. The books are equally successful elsewhere, having been translated into more than twenty-five languages. The phenomenon of their success has generated debate. In Britain, Anthony Holden, a Whitbread book prize judge, threatened to resign in June 2000 if Rowling received the prize for Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban instead of Seamus Heaney for his translation of Beowulf; he wrote a scathing article in The Observer (The Observer, 25 June 2000) in which he claimed Rowling’s ‘story lines are predictable, the suspense minimal, the sentimental cloring every page (Did Harry, like so many heroes before him, have to be yet another poignant orphan?)’. Holden’s comments triggered one of the largest collections of written responses to an article ever received by the Observer. In America, too, the books’ success has provoked reaction. Some American parents have suggested that the Harry Potter books should be withdrawn from schools because of their content; they believe that identification with Harry Potter and his experiences of death and magic will encourage children to explore violence, murder and the occult.

By adopting a psychoanalytic perspective (acknowledging that this is only one of many ways of approaching the question of the books’ popularity, or notoriety), it is hoped to show that the extraordinary success of the Harry Potter books is due, in part, to the universal phantasies they contain, in particular, those deriving from the Oedipal period.

Freud suggested that creative writers, whose unconscious often fuels their writing, entice us to read about their creations by offering us the chance to enjoy our phantasies without self-reproach or shame (Freud, 1908). It follows that, the more common the phantasy, the more popular the work of literature will be which allows us to engage with it, whether consciously or not.

The author need not be aware that her works contain these phantasies: indeed, J. K. Rowling in a recent article said:

The most frequently asked question you get as an author is ‘where do you get your ideas from?’ I find this frustrating because I haven’t got the faintest idea
where my ideas come from, or how my imagination works. I'm just grateful that it does, because it gives me more entertainment than it gives anyone else. (The Sunday Times, 21 May 2000).

Freud discusses phantasy in detail in his papers on creative writers and daydreaming (Freud, 1908) and in his paper on the formulations of the two principles of mental functioning (Freud, 1911). He suggests that phantasising is what we do when our ego, acting in accordance with the reality principle and taking into account the often frustrating external world, comes into conflict with the pleasure principle, which seeks immediate fulfilment of id demands. Phantasy represents a compromise between the two: it creates an internal world which represents the external world as we should like it to be.

Hanna Segal suggests that writers, and other artists, can afford to let their phantasies run free because their art provides them with a secure link to reality (Segal, 1994). Similarly, a book can provide the reader, as well as the writer, with this link to reality, this security. Alice climbing through the looking glass, the back of the wardrobe in an old house providing a doorway into Narnia, flying out of a nursery window then 'second to the right and straight on till morning': the reader's link to reality is the point of entry into a world which does not really exist, from fictional reality to fictional phantasy, from a room in a house to Wonderland, Narnia or Never-Never Land. Works of fiction appease the reality principle—we know that what we are reading about is not really happening—so allow fulfilment of id phantasies, through our immersion in the book, without the danger to the ego which would arise were the phantasies acted out.

In the case of Harry Potter, we know that we are about to enter an unreal world when Harry, who has just learned that he is a wizard, arrives at Kings Cross station to look for Platform 9 3/4, from which a train will take him to Hogwarts, the school for young witches and wizards, to begin his first term. Worried that he cannot see his platform or his train, he asks a mother of another young wizard how to get to Platform 9 3/4. He is told that he needs to walk straight through the barrier between platforms 9 and 10 without stopping and without being scared that he will crash into it:

He started to walk towards it. People jostled him on their way to platforms 9 and 10. Harry walked more quickly. He was going to smash right into that ticket box and then he'd be in trouble—leaning forward on his trolley, he broke into a heavy run—the barrier was coming nearer and nearer—he wouldn't be able to stop—the trolley was out of control—he was a foot away—he closed his eyes ready for the crash—

It didn't come ... he kept on running ... he opened his eyes.

A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people. A sign overhead said Hogwarts Express, 11 o'clock. Harry looked behind him and saw a wrought-iron archway where the ticket box had been, with the words 'Platform Nine and Three Quarters' on it. He had done it. (Rowling, 1997, p. 213).

The reality principle by which our ego operates is given two strong reminders that our entry into the Harry Potter world will not jeopardise our relationship with the external world: first, we are aware that we are reading a book; second, we know that Platform 9 3/4 does not really exist. Each of the four books ends with the train journey back to London Kings Cross, passing the other way through the barrier back to fictional reality and Harry leaving the station with his step-parents to endure another Summer holiday.
with them and without magic. So, even within the works of fiction, we are taken from a description of real life (which, in Harry Potter's case, is grim) into one of magic (which represents life as we would like it to be) and then brought back again. Because of this, we can suspend our reality principle this side of the barrier at Kings Cross, to give full rein to the pleasure principle at Hogwarts.

Hogwarts, Narnia, Wonderland and Never-Never Land are unrealistic representations of the real world. Bettelheim has made clear how these works of literature which take us into imaginary places provide a place where phantasies can be safely explored. The stories are to do with the psychical world, not the external world:

The unrealistic nature of these tales (which narrow-minded rationalists object to) is an important device because it makes obvious that the fairy tales' concern is not useful information about the external world but the inner processes taking place in an individual. (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 25).

Harry Potter goes through Platform 9 3/4 for the first time just after his eleventh birthday. Until then, Harry had endured a hellish existence. His parents dead, he lived with his pompous and boorish uncle, Vernon Dursley, who was 'the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills', a 'big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large moustache', his nosy aunt, Petunia, whose neck was twice as long as normal, helping her to spy on the neighbours, and their son, Dudley Dursley, who was very fat, doted on by his parents and who joined with them in bullying Harry. Harry lived in a cupboard under the stairs.

On his eleventh birthday, Harry discovers two things: first, that he is a wizard and has a place to study at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry; second, that his parents did not, as he had been told by his aunt and uncle, die in a car crash when Harry was one, the impact of the crash leaving a scar on Harry's forehead, but had, in fact, been murdered by Lord Voldemort, an immensely powerful wizard who had gone over to the Dark Side. Harry survived Voldemort's attack but was left with a scar, in the shape of a lightning flash on his forehead, Voldemort’s powers having been almost destroyed when the curse he tried to use to kill Harry rebounded on him.

Harry therefore arrives at Hogwarts as one of the most famous young wizards of all time, his parents, former Head Boy and Head Girl of Hogwarts, having been killed by Lord Voldemort, and Harry being the first wizard ever to survive an attack by the Dark Lord. Harry is slightly built, has dark untidy hair and bright green eyes. He becomes the youngest Hogwarts player for a century to play Quidditch, the school's sport, for his house. In short, Harry is a hero with whom we can identify. Freud noted that:

One feature above all cannot fail to strike us about the creations of these story-writers: each of them has a hero who is the centre of interest, for whom the writer tries to win our sympathy by every possible means and whom he seems to place under the protection of the special Providence... the feeling of security with which I follow the hero through his perilous adventures is the same as the feeling with which a hero in real life throws himself into the water to save a drowning man or exposes himself to the enemy's fire in order to storm a battery. It is a true heroic feeling, which one of our best writers has expressed in an inimitable phrase: 'nothing can happen to me!'. It seems to me, however, that through this revealing characteristic of invulnerability, we can immediately recognize His Majesty, the Ego, the hero alike of every daydream and of every story (Freud, 1908, p. 28).

Our hero, Harry/our ego, is an orphan: as the quotation with which this essay began.
K. Noel-Smith

shows, his parents gave their lives to save his from an attack by Voldemort. Why would we want to identify with someone who has suffered such an appalling tragedy? Perhaps because the manner of Harry's parents' deaths satisfies unconscious Oedipal wishes.

Freud believed that the universal phantasy of children to enjoy exclusive possession of the mother, through the removal of the father, explains the powerful and enduring impact of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, in which Oedipus unconsciously fulfils the fate predicted for him by the Oracle by killing his father and marrying his mother: the play's popularity can be explained in terms of its appeal to our murderous and incestuous phantasies towards our parents. These phantasies are the repressed wishes that once coursed their way through us: 'falling in love with one parent and hating the other forms part of the permanent stock of psychic impulses which arise in early childhood' (Freud, 1900).

With Shakespeare's Hamlet and Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov, Freud thought that Oedipus Rex was one of the greatest literary masterpieces of all time, the common thread running through the works being one of parricide and the motive for the deed being sexual rivalry for a woman (Freud, 1928).

The very first relationship, the mother/baby dyad, is one which constitutes the baby's world, giving rise to phantasies of omnipotence and exclusive possession of the mother. An awareness of the father, and all that the father represents, generates intense feelings of rejection, exclusion and hatred but, if the knowledge can be tolerated, sees the emergence from the Oedipal crucible of an individual with the capacity to reflect and think and with an identity separate from that of the mother.

Although the earlier Oedipal wishes are relinquished, however, such relinquishment involves repression, meaning that we carry within our unconscious phantasies of enjoying again the early fused identity with our mother and exclusive possession of her. This phantasy necessarily involves the removal of the father and the collapse of the Oedipal triangle.

As we saw, the last thing that Harry's father does is acknowledge the exclusive relationship of Harry and his mother. He gives his life in an attempt to preserve it:

"Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off—" (Rowling, 1999, p. 178).

Harry's mother, Lily, her name and her sacrifice for her son symbolising all that is pure and good, dies to save Harry's life:

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead—" (Rowling, 1999, p. 134).

Given that it is every child's phantasy to remove, by death, his or her father to enjoy exclusive possession of his or her mother (and, inversely, to eliminate one's mother to take her place with one's father), the reader of Harry Potter is able to indulge in wish fulfilment of the most basic phantasies without the grief which would ordinarily attach to them: we know, at a conscious level, that the story is not true. Unconsciously, the deaths of Harry's parents represent a wonderful fulfilment of Oedipal phantasies.

The Harry Potter phantasy goes one better than that told by Little Hans, a five-year-old boy analysed by Freud by proxy (Freud, 1909a). Hans phantasises being married to his mother and a generational transfer upwards for his father, whereby his father forms a couple with his own mother, neatly removing Hans' father without killing him and, one would suppose, providing his father with the same type of pleasurable situation which Hans is seeking.

In Hans' phantasy there is not the same evidence of the absolute parental love for their child which Harry Potter gets from his parents in their giving their lives to save his.
Harry knows that his father died to preserve the exclusive relationship of Harry and his mother; his mother gave her life to save her son. Harry's mother's love is what prevented and continues to prevent the damaging impact of Voldemort's persecutory attacks on Harry. As the kindly wizard Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts, tells Harry:

"Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realise that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign ... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever" (Rowling, 1997, p. 216).

Harry's scar is a special mark evidencing the force of the internalised good mother which caused Voldemort's curse to rebound on him in his attack on the Potter family when Harry was one. This special mark brings to mind other special marks, for example, the scars Oedipus had on his feet, where his parents pierced them before they left him to die, the mark of Cain, who murdered his brother, and the stigmata of Christ, who, being the Son of Man, was murdered by his collective parents. Even Voldemort acknowledges Harry's parents' qualities:

I always value bravery ... yes, boy, your parents were brave ... I killed your father first and he put up a courageous fight ... but your mother needn't have died ... she was trying to protect you ...". (Rowling, 1997, p. 213).

With a brave father and self-sacrificing mother, we can see that J.K. Rowling has created a Family Romance for us to enjoy: although Harry’s parents are dead, he had, for a short period, parents which all of us would like: his parents are perfect parents and allow us, through identification with Harry, fulfilment of a universal wish derived from:

The child's longing for the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the dearest and loveliest of women. (Freud, 1909b).

It should be noted that Harry is not glad that his parents are dead and necessarily so: such enjoyment of wish fulfilment would be unacceptable to our consciousness. Instead, when Harry sits in front of a magical mirror which he learns later from Dumbledore 'shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts', he sees his father, father and other members of his family. The mirror has an inscription carved around the top: Erised Str Ehu Ery Ubu Eca Eru Oyt On Wohsi (that is, a reversal of: 'I show not your face but your heart's desire'). The mirror reflects back our wish fulfilment of Harry’s wish fulfilment, that is, we see not slain parents but loving ones:

'Mum?' he whispered. 'Dad?'. The Potters smiled and waved at Harry and he stared hungrily back at them, his hands pressed flat against the glass as though he was hoping to fall right through it and reach them. He had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness. (Rowling, 1997, p. 153).

Harry’s dead parents do not represent his wish fulfilment, but rather fulfilment of the reader's unconscious fantasies. Harry’s parents are perfect parents in phantasy: father dying to preserve the mother/baby dyad; mother dying, too, but after giving her child such love that he will be protected from evil forever. They are ideal parents.

Idealisation represents one of the most primitive defences identified by Klein, an unconscious mechanism based on phantasy which is invoked during the paranoid-schizoid position (that is, before resolution of the Oedipus complex) to split an object into good and bad part objects. The very first splitting is between good breast and bad breast. As a child becomes older, and begins to integrate his or her part objects into
whole objects, he or she moves from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position, whereby a more realistic view of the world is adopted. Fathers and mothers are not perfect, although each child wishes that they were and, in early life, phantasises good parents which are.

Britton suggests that, where a mother is unable to contain her infant’s projected feelings, for whatever reason, the father, unfortunately, often provides a repository for the projected bad feelings that the baby is aware that his or her mother is unable to contain (Britton, 1989). This is a development of Bion’s concept of container and contained, whereby a containing mother facilitates the child’s integration of good and bad part objects and his or her move from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position, by containing the baby’s projected intolerable feelings, processing them and feeding them back to the baby in a more digestible and manageable form.

Bion suggests that a third object emerges from the relationship between the container and the contained: where there is a good relationship between the container and contained, this third object is to the advantage of all three; in a bad relationship between the container and the contained, this third object is destructive to all three (Bion, 1970).

If the third object is the phantasised hostile father/penis, the repository for the infant’s uncontained hostile feelings, the father will be viewed as a persecutory figure characterised by the degree of aggression projected by the child.

If Harry’s dead parents are seen as composite, a phantasised perfect container, there is necessarily someone or something into which the split-off bad parts of Harry’s parents (and of Harry) have been projected. This repository of evil is Lord Voldemort who is destructive: we know that he murdered Harry’s parents, failing to kill Harry during that onslaught but leaving Harry with a scar as a sign of the persecutory attack. In the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2000), Lord Voldemort has recovered sufficient strength to try to murder Harry again.

The defensive mechanism of splitting whole objects into good and bad parts necessarily involves a repudiation of part of reality. Money-Kyrle suggests that one of the most difficult parts of reality to tolerate is the passage of time (Money-Kyrle, 1968). The reality principle demands an acceptance of past, present and future and of our own death. In our unconscious, however, and in phantasy, a timeless universe exists. Two incidents within the *Harry Potter* books allow us to indulge our wish that the real world did not have linear time.

Time becomes elastic to accommodate Harry Potter, and thus our own phantasies, twice: once when Harry relives a three-hour period to alter events so that an innocent magical beast and his parents’ best man, second time around, both avoid death (perhaps atoning in some way for the unconscious guilt Harry feels about his parents’ deaths); and once to meet Voldemort fifty years before, when Voldemort was a boy of nearly the same age as Harry.

Towards the end of Harry’s first experience of the three-hour period, Harry is lying on his back by a lake, terrified and confused, about to be annihilated by a Dementor. A Dementor is a horrible, hooded monster, evocative of the worst fears of the Grim Reaper, which feeds upon ‘hope, happiness and the desire to survive’. Harry is saved by someone on the other side of the lake who sends out a powerful Patronus just before the Dementor annihilates Harry by kissing him, a Dementor’s kiss sucking out an individual’s essence but not killing the body. A Patronus is ‘a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the Dementor feeds upon’. This Patronus takes the form of a stag and we know that Harry’s father was one of the few wizards who could change his form and, whilst he was a student at Hogwarts, often transformed into a stag called Prongs.
Harry Potter's Oedipal Issues

Just before Harry passes out, after the Dementor has been forced to retreat because of the strength of the Patronus, he watches the Patronus return to the wizard who had sent it and tries to make out the identity of the person who had saved him:

eyes blurred with sweat, Harry tried to make out what it was ... it was bright as a unicorn. Fighting to stay conscious, Harry watched it canter to a halt as it reached the opposite shore. For a moment, Harry saw, by its brightness, somebody welcoming it back ... raising his hand to pat it ... someone who looked strangely familiar ... but it couldn't be ..." (Rowling, 1999, p. 282).

Harry believed the person he had seen to be his dead father. When he travels back through time to save two innocent lives, he runs towards the opposite bank of the lake and hides behind a bush to catch sight of his father. He watches again his other self being approached by the annihilating Dementor. Looking round in desperation for his father, he suddenly becomes aware that no rescuer is going to appear:

And then it bit him—he understood. He hadn't seen his father—he had seen himself—Harry flung himself out from behind the bush and pulled out his wand. 'EXPECTO PATRONUM!' he yelled.

And out of the end of his wand burst, not a shapeless cloud of mist, but a blinding, dazzling, silver animal (Rowling, 1999, p. 302).

After saving his earlier self on the opposite bank, the Patronus, the bright, white stag, returns to Harry who, with trembling fingertips, stretches out towards the creature which then vanishes.

When Harry later tells Dumbledore about this, Dumbledore says:

"You think the dead we have loved every truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself more plainly when you have need of him. How else could you produce that particular Patronus? Prongs rode again last night" (Rowling, 1999, p. 312).

This incident provides another wonderful example, by analogy, of the power of an introjected good parent. In The Philosopher's Stone, Harry's introjected good mother prevents Voldemort from hurting Harry in the attack during which his parents were killed; in The Prisoner of Azkaban, Harry is able to project his introjected good father as a Patronus to defeat a Dementor, something which would otherwise annihilate him.

The other fulfilment of our phantasy that time be elastic occurs in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets when Harry Potter meets Voldemort. Lord Voldemort is feared so much that most wizards and witches fear to name him and prefer to call him "You-Know-Who" or "He Who Must Not Be Named".

Harry travels back through time to meet Voldemort as Voldemort was fifty years before, that is, when he was a schoolboy, Tom Riddle, who looked remarkably like Harry. Voldemort remarks on their similarities:

"Because there are strange likenesses between us, Harry Potter. Even you must have noticed. Both half-bloods [Harry's mother and Voldemort's father were from non-magic families], orphans, raised by Muggles [non-magic families]. Probably the only two Parselmouths [people who can talk to snakes] to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even look something alike." (Rowling, 1998, p. 233).

Another striking example of the links between Harry and his enemy occurs when Harry
buys his first wand. A wand has to be the right wand for the wizard: there has to be a good fit. Harry tries several wands before:

He felt a sudden warmth in his fingers. He waved the wand above his head, brought it swishing down through the dusty air and a stream of red and gold sparks shot from the end like a firework, throwing dancing spots of light on to the walls.

The wand seller says:

"I remember every wand I've ever sold, Mr Potter. Every single one. It so happens that the Phoenix, whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather—just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand, when its brother—why, its brother gave you that scar... the wand chooses the wizard, remember... I think we must expect great things from you, Mr Potter... after all, He Who Must Not Be Named did great things—terrible, yes, but great" (Rowling, 1997, p. 65).

In a confrontation, during which Tom Riddle takes Harry's wand, Harry learns that Tom Riddle is Lord Voldemort as he was fifty years before:

'Voldemort', said Riddle softly, 'is my past, present and future, Harry Potter...'. He pulled Harry's wand from his pocket and began to trace it through the air, writing three shimmering words: Tom Marvolo Riddle. Then he waved the wand once, and the letters of his name re-arranged themselves:


It has been suggested that Harry Potter's dead parents represent our phantasy of perfect parents and provide an example of the early idealisation of parents which takes place in what Klein called the paranoid-schizoid position. Lord Voldemort is the repository for the split-off bad parts of Harry's parents. Klein emphasised that, where splitting of whole objects occurs, there is also splitting within the self (Klein, 1958). So, where do Harry's split-off bad parts go? Into Tom Riddle, the boy who later became Lord Voldemort.

The main characters of the Harry Potter books, then, allow the reader to enjoy a phantasy which denies the reality of the Oedipal configuration. What we have here is not an Oedipal triangle, but a phantasised and fragile triangular situation: in one corner, Harry, the hero (our ego); in another, Harry's good, dead parents, who live on, through introjection, in Harry (our phantasy of ideal parents); and, in the third, the evil Lord Voldemort, his adult self the repository for the split-off bad parts of Harry's perfect parents, his boyhood self a repository for similar parts of Harry.

A comparison of the similarities between Harry and Voldemort suggests how precarious this configuration is: it is not one which withstands the rigorous scrutiny of an ego functioning under the reality principle.

With their 'brother' wands, their striking similarity in looks, abilities and backgrounds, and, through time travel, age, Harry and Tom Riddle/Voldemort represent polarised aspects of good and evil, that is, split part objects of the same whole object. Each is the other's 'past, present and future'. As we saw above, the adult Lord Voldemort is the dark side of Harry's idealised parents: his boyhood self, Tom Riddle, is Harry's other half. In this collapse of time, where Lord Voldemort becomes the same age as Harry, we also have a collapse of the perfect parents/Voldemort/Harry Potter configuration. Voldemort, Harry's parents and Tom Riddle all collapse into Harry, our hero, and we are left alone with His Majesty, the ego, and the Oedipal phantasies it struggles to repress.
These Oedipal phantasies are, according to Freud, universal: it is suggested that the Harry Potter books are so successful because the world they describe is one in which these universal phantasies can be enjoyed.

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Wizard Words: The Literary, Latin, and Lexical Origins of Harry Potter's Vocabulary

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The *Harry Potter* books, so mind-bogglingly popular in England, the United States, and all over the world, are not just good literature but a treasury of wordplay and invention. In naming her characters, beasts, spells, places, and objects, author J. K. Rowling makes use of Latin, French, and German words, poetic devices, and language jokes. It is not necessary to pick up on the wordplay to enjoy the series—indeed, it is unlikely that most young people, or adults for that matter, have noticed everything there is to notice. Rowling herself may not be sure of the origins of some of the vocabulary. She said in an amazon.com interview, “It is always hard to tell what your influences are. Everything you’ve seen, experienced, read, or heard gets broken down like compost in your head and then your own ideas grow out of that compost.”

Muggle: An Old Word, A New Word

Even those who have not read a word of *Harry Potter* may, at this point, be familiar with the term *Muggle*, which is used to describe nonmagic people, places, and things. Literary agent Jane Lebowitz is quoted in *We Love Harry Potter* saying that Muggle has already become part of her family’s everyday vocabulary. This word is the most likely candidate from the series to become a permanent part of the English language, and is currently in consideration for inclusion in a future edition of the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*.

We first hear the word *Muggle* in the first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (*Philosopher’s Stone* in England—but in the interest of space, I won’t be discussing the texts of the American vs. English editions). In chapter four, the friendly giant, Hagrid, shows up at Harry’s home to take him to wizard school, warning Harry’s Uncle Vernon not to get in the way:

“I’d like ter see a great Muggle like you stop him,” he said.

“A what?” said Harry, interested.

“A Muggle,” said Hagrid, “it’s what we call nonmagic folks like them. An’ it’s your bad luck you grew up in a family of the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on.”

So Muggle is not just a descriptive term, it’s a pejorative—an insult. And, as with stupidity or coarseness, there are degrees of Mugglehood.

(Naturally, a person can’t help being born Muggle or wizard, and in the fourth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the wizard community debates whether all Muggles are inherently bad. The darker wizard forces believe the wizard “race” to be superior, and want to wipe out all Muggles. Their logic is, of course, flawed, since Muggle parents can have wizard children—Harry’s friend Hermione Granger is one such mudblood. The reverse is also true: Argus Filch, caretaker at Hogwarts, tries to hide the fact that he is a squib, a wizard-born child who lacks wizard powers. A damp squib in English slang is a firework that fails to explode when lit, or a joke that fails to come off, or any enterprise that fails. Argus, by the way, is a hundred-eyed giant in Greek mythology, and *filch*, of course, is a slang term for the act of petty thieving.)

But back to Muggle. It turns out that Rowling did not invent the word, although she may not have been aware of its early meanings. It was the
Kentish word for tail in the 13th century (also appearing as moggie) and, believe it or not, was English and American slang for marijuana as early as 1926 and as late as 1972. Mystery writers Raymond Chandler and Ed McBain used the word this way (“the desk clerk's a mugglesmoker”; “Some kid was shoving muggles...”), and perhaps Louis Armstrong's 1928 record “Muggles” made use of this meaning. A mugglehead was someone who smoked pot; a muggler was an addict.

Why does the word work so well to describe unwizardly culture? Perhaps because it echoes so many low, earthy words. In the 19th century, a muggins was a dolt or simpleton. Mugwort and mugweed are names for the common plant also known as wormwood. Muggle sounds like a combination of mud, muddle, mug (a slang term for face or especially grimace; photographs of criminals are mug-shots), bug (the Bugs Buggies recorded "Video Killed the Radio Star" in 1979—but that seems beside the point), Mugsy (a common gangster nickname in film and television—also a character from Bugs Bunny cartoons, whose repeated line is “Duh, okay boss”), and Mudville (where Casey struck out). It's difficult, in fact, to find an echo of anything airy or light in the word, so it's a good one to describe regular, boring, non-magic aspects of life.

Characters

Many of the less important characters in the series have alliterative, almost tongue-twister names. These include Harry's nasty, gluttonous cousin Dudley Dursley; his fellow Hogwarts students Colin Creevey, Gladys Gudgeon, Cho Chang, and the twins, Parvati and Padma Patil; Poppy Pomfrey, the school nurse; Florean Fortescue, who owns the ice cream parlor; Peter Pettigrew, the rat animagus (a wizard who can turn into an animal at will—combination of animal and mage or magus, magician); and Bathilda Bagshot, author of the wizard textbook, A History of Magic. In the fourth book in the series, the rhyme goes internal: Rita Skeeter is the troublesome journalist who puts Harry in no small danger. “Miss Skeeter” echoes mosquito, a similarly bloodthirsty pest, and indeed, Skeeter is an animagus who takes the form of an insect. More wordplay: she uses this ability in order to bug—listen in on—conversations at the wizard school.

The four founders of Hogwarts also have alliterative names: Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin. It is for these characters that the four houses of the school are named: Gryffindor (for the brave—this is where Harry, Ron, and Hermione are placed), Hufflepuff (for the loyal), Ravenclaw (for the ambitious), and Hufflepuff (for the witty). A griffin or griffon, by the way, is half lion, half eagle, and according to legend is the sworn enemy of the (slimy and slithering) snake. And speaking of snakes, a snake named Nagina attacks Harry—this name echoes that of Nag, the cobra in Rudyard Kipling’s short story “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi.”

Harry and those close to him have less cartoonish names. Their names do not give them away. The Potters—Harry and his parents, James and Lily—share a surname with a neighbor family of Rowling’s girlhood. Harry’s friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger have non-coded names: Ron is extremely loyal, exhibiting no weasel-like qualities; Hermione has a little in common with the daughter of Helen of Troy, nor with the Shakespeare character of the same name.

Many of the professors at Hogwarts, on the other hand, have particularly telling names. Severus Snape (severe, snipe, snub) is an unpleasant and strict teacher who keeps getting passed over for promotion. Vindictus Veridian (vindicative, green with jealousy) teaches a class on curses and counter-curses. Professor Sprout runs Herbology. Professor Quirrel is querulous and squarly. Alastor Moody (alastor is Greek for avenging deity) waits many years for his chance to take revenge. Gilderoy Lockhart, the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher in the second book, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, is vanity incarnate. Indeed, his name sounds like that of a character in a Harlequin romance. The
Gild in Gilderoy echoes *gilding the lily*, gratuitous excess—and also *gilt*, fake gold. Certainly Gilderoy is far from worthy of the love and adoration he feels for Dobby. Gilderoy is far from worthy of the love and adoration he feels for himself.

Harry's nemesis at school is Draco Malfoy, a name that screams evil: the first part sounds like *dragon* (and indeed, *draco* is Latin for dragon, and Draconian Law, named after the Athenian lawyer Draco, is known for its harshness); the second, like *malevolent, malignant, or malfeasance*. Also, *mal foí* is French for 'bad faith.' Draco's toadies are Crabbe and Goyle, echoes of *crab* (as in crabby, grumpy) and *gargoyle*. His father's name is Lucius, which echoes *Lucifer*, a name for the devil; his mother's name is Narcissa, as in *narcissistic*. (By the way: the Malfoys' elf—slave in the second book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, is named Dobby, an alternate term for *brownie*, or house elf, in certain parts of England.)

The most evil character of all, Voldemort, is usually identified simply as *he-who-must-not-be-named or you-know-who*—clearly, for many people, names have a certain power of their own. (Harry himself never subscribes to this belief.) Voldemort actually has several names; at one point he is known as Tom Marvolo Riddle, an anagram for "I am Lord Voldemort." Each piece of Voldemort's name, broken down, sounds rather unappealing: *vole* is a rodent, and *mort* is Latin for death. If we treat the name as a loose anagram, we can also pull out *mole, mold,* and *vile*. *Vol de mort* is French for 'flight from death,' and indeed, Voldemort manages to escape death repeatedly.

So, names can give away the good or evil nature of a character—and, because nothing in the *Harry Potter* series is that simple, they can also fool you. Language scholars will not be too surprised to learn that Remus Lupin turns out to be a werewolf. According to legend, Romulus and Remus—the founders of Rome—were suckled by a wolf, and the Latin word for wolf is *lupus*. But those who know their plant life may associate him with the *lupin*, a pretty lilac-like flower, and indeed, the Professor, despite his tendency to turn beastly at the full moon, is a good, harmless soul.

Similarly, Sirius Black (*serious, black*) has a name that makes him sound like a terrible villain and is assumed to be so for most of the third book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. He turns out, however, to be quite the opposite. Black is an animagus who can take the form of a dog (which explains his nickname of Padfoot), and Sirius (Latin, 'burning') is the formal name for the dog star, the brightest star in the constellation Canis Major ('big dog').

Albus Dumbledore is another tricky one. Despite his name, he is most certainly not dumb. He is the "Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards" and the head of Hogwarts. *Albus* is Latin for white; *dumbledore* is an old English word for bumblebee.

Some of the animal names in the series allude to literary or historical characters. The cat who wanders the halls of Hogwarts is Mrs. Norris, very probably named after a character from Jane Austen, Rowling's favorite author. Like the cat, Fanny Price's Aunt Norris in *Mansfield Park* is a terrible busybody of unparalleled nosiness. Hermione's cat is Crookshanks, probably named after the 19th-century English caricaturist George Cruikshank, best known for his illustrations of fairy tales and Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. (In the "Splendid Strolling" chapter of John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*, Mr. Wilson tells Mrs. Gamp that it was "The great George . . . the Crookshanks' who escorted her into her carriage.) *Crookshanks* is also an old-fashioned insult meaning 'crooked shanks' or 'crooked legs.' In the translations of the *Harry Potter* books, Hermione's cat is named variations on this insult: *Krummbein* in German, *Knikkebeen* in Dutch, *Skeivskank* in Norwegian, and *Koukkujalka* in Finnish.

**Spells**

Most of the spells in the *Harry Potter* books are based on English or Latin, and so the meanings are fairly straightforward. *Reducio!* (Latin
reducere) reduces the size of an object, for example. Engorgio! (Old French engorgier) engorges or enlarges it. Reparo! (Latin reparare) repairs. Riddikulus! (Latin ridiculus) turns an enemy—usually a Boggart—into something ridiculous or laughable. Lumos! (Latin lumen, 'light') causes illumination. Impedimenta! (Latin impedimentum) impedes or slows the enemy. Sonorus! (Latin sonor, 'sound; English sonorous) causes one’s wand to become a microphone. Stupefy! (Latin stupefacere, stupere, 'to be stunned') stupifies the enemy, causing confusion. Expellarmus! (Latin expellere, 'to drive out') expels your opponent’s wand from his or her hand.

And then there are the three spells that wizards are forbidden to use on each other: Imperio! (Latin imperium, ‘command; English imperious) gives total power. Crucio! (Latin cruciere, ‘to crucify or torture,’ from crux, ‘cross; English excruciating) causes pain; and Avada Kedavra is the death spell. This last term in Aramaic means ‘Let the thing be destroyed;’ it weirdly echoes the magic word every school child knows, abracadabra, but incorporates the sound of cadaver. (Abracadabra is an extremely old word of unknown origin. It may derive from the Aramaic; it may just be a nonsense sound. Another possibility is that the repeated a|brus stand for the first sounds of the Hebrew letters signifying Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Ab, Ben, Ruach, and Acadosch. The first documented appearance of abracadabra is in a 2nd-century poem by Q. Severus Samonicus. It is still in use as a magical word today.) A fourth evil spell is Morsmordre! which sends the “dark mark”—a skull with a snake coming out of its mouth—into the sky. It is a combination of mors, Latin ‘death,’ and mordre. French ‘to bite.’ The word also echoes Mordred, the name of King Arthur’s illegitimate son and enemy, and Mordor, the evil area of Tolkien’s Middle Earth, “where the shadows lie.” Mordred and Mordor, in turn, echo murder.

There are, of course, a great many more spells beyond these, some used only once or twice in the entire series. Furnunculus! for example, causes horrible boils to erupt all over a victim’s skin, and a furunculus (lacking the first n in the spell word) is a type of boil. Tarantallegra! (tarantula, ‘spider,’ tarantella, Spanish dance; allegro, musical term for ‘fast,’ from the Italian) causes the victim’s legs to dance uncontrollably. Waddiwasi! in one case sends a wad of gum out of a keyhole and up a particular victim’s nose. Peskipiksi Pesternomi! (“pesky pixies, pester not me”) is useful for handling Cornish pixies.

Places

Rowling has some of her greatest fun in naming places. The despicable Dursleys, Harry’s adoptive family, live in Little Whinging, Surrey (whingeing is British English for whining). Dudley Dursley (who is certainly a dud) proudly attends Smeltings School, which is a clever play on the idea of the finishing school, since to smelt is to refine, as in ore. Smelt as a noun is a type of fish, and as a verb is the British English past tense of smelt. So Smeltings is a stinky finishing school, perfect for Dudley’s alma mater.
To meet his wizarding needs, Harry visits the shops in Diagon Alley (diagonally) and Knockturn Alley (nocturnally) before setting up residence at Hogwarts, the wizard school. Hogwarts, an inversion of warthogs, also contains the ideas of hog and warts—indeed, the first line of the school song is “Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts.”

Other wizard schools are Beauxbatons (French for ‘beautiful wands’) and Durmstrang (an inversion of the German Sturm und Drang, ‘storm and stress,’ also the name of a German literary movement in the 18th century whose followers included Goethe and Schiller). The name of Azkaban, the wizard jail, echoes that of Alcatraz, the supposedly inescapable American prison off the coast of San Francisco. Azkaban is guarded by Dementors (who can make you demented).

To travel from place to place, wizards may use Floo Powder, which transports them magically from one chimney flue to another. Perhaps Rowling was thinking of the old tongue-twister limerick, which goes, in one version:

A flea and a fly in a flue;
Were caught, so what could they do?
Said the flea, “Let us fly!”
Said the fly, “Let us flee!”
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

Other Stuff

Wizard candies have the same kind of exuberant, lyrical names as those in Roald Dahl’s books. Fizzling whizbies are sherbet balls that make you levitate—strong echoes of the Fizzy Lifting Drink in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Everlasting Gobstoppers may not be available, but Hogwarts students do enjoy Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans (in flavors including marmalade, spinach, liver, tripe, sprouts, toast, curry, grass, sardine, and earwax), Drooble’s Best Blowing Gum, Chocolate Frogs, Pumpkin Pasties, Cauldron Cakes, Toothflossing Stringmints, and Pepper Imps. Harry and his friends also drink frothy mugs of butterbeer, a play on butterscotch and root beer.

In sports, the Hogwarts students have Quidditch—a wizard form of soccer—involved Bludgers (who bludgeon), Beaters (who beat) and the Golden Snitch, which Harry, as Seeker, has to snatch out of the sky. To do this, he rides his Nimbus 2000 broomstick, nimbus indicating ‘radiant light,’ or a type of cloud.

Besides broomsticks, magical objects found around Hogwarts include the Mirror of Erised, which shows what you most desire. Erised, of course, is desire backward. Harry sees his parents in the mirror and briefly believes them to be alive, until he figures out the secret of the mirror. Hermione, Ron, and Harry make use of a Polyjuice potion, which changes them into other shapes; poly means many, as in polyglot (many languages) or polygamy (many spouses). The Remembrall is a crystal-ball-like device that turns red when one has forgotten to do something; it is a ball that helps you remember all. And Spellotape—a sticky substance used to mend wands and so on—is a play on Sellotape, a British brand of cellulose (American Scotch) tape. Other magical objects include Mrs. Skower’s [scours] All-Purpose Magical Mess Remover, the Pocket Sneakoscope, the Put-Outer, and the Revealer (the opposite of an eraser).

Passwords

Along with learning spells and the names of magical objects, wizards-in-training have to memorize passwords. To get into the common room of Gryffindor House at Hogwarts, Harry must pass the Fat Lady, a talking portrait of a woman in a pink dress who usually makes up the passwords. Her choices include the fairly simple banana fritters, pig snout, and wattlebird along with the more evocative balderdash and flibbertigibbet. Balderdash in the 16th century was a jumbled mixture of liquors, but by the 17th century it had come to mean a jumbled mixture of words, and by the 19th it meant obscene language. Flibbertigibbet, too, was a 16th century representation of meaningless chatter; it also meant a chattering person, more specifically a prattling woman, or—now quite obsolete—it could be the
name of a devil or demon (in Act III, scene iv, of Shakespeare's King Lear, Edgar speaks of "the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet," who "hurts the poor creature of earth").

For a time, when the Fat Lady is out of commission, another portrait is in charge, a knight named Sir Cadogan; his passwords include scurvy cut and oddsbodkins. This last is an exclamation meaning God's body, 'od being a minced form of God (like gee for Jesus) which came into vogue around 1600. Exclamations of the period included od's blood, od's body, od's bones, od's wounds, and so on, which turned into od's bob, od's bodikins, oddsbodikins, odspsittikens, odskilderkins, odzounds, and so on. (Sir Cadogan, by the way, is a real person in British history. His portrait shows him with hair secured in back by a ribbon. Cadogan became the word for this hairstyle.)

In much the same way as these words serve as passwords to gain entrance into the private rooms of Hogwarts, the invented vocabulary and wordplay of the Harry Potter books serve as passwords for us Muggles to gain entrance into the wizard world. Someday, perhaps, we will have an annotated version of the Harry Potter books (like the annotated Alice in Wonderland or Wizard of Oz), explaining and expanding on the lexical origins of wizard vocabulary. For now, however, we have to make do with the unwitting collaborative efforts of Harry Potter fans all over the world creating websites and writing articles on the subject.

[Jessy Randall's last article for VERBATIM was "Blah, Blah, Blah, Etcetera" in XXVI/4.]

Proverbs Up-to-Date

Graeme Garvey
Leeds, West Yorkshire

Proverbs, being traditional sayings, throw light on a culture's attitudes and beliefs. They have been popular both down the centuries and the world over. References abound throughout literature. Just one example is Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote, which makes copious references to Spanish proverbs, using them to add weight and authority. Since a proverbial reference has generally been taken to express a supposed truth or moral lesson, it has usually been made with the intent of guiding or commenting on people's actions.

We have a problem of cultural identity in Britain right now, however, and one manifestation of it is the decreasing familiarity that Britons, especially the younger ones, have with proverbs. To many they seem obscure and old-fashioned. Society has changed greatly in the latter years of the twentieth century, and technology proffers a shining path. There are so many novelties to please and entertain us. What need have we of these odd expressions? Fearing the dire consequences of "information overload" we jettison old things in order to accommodate the new. Further, there is an almost gleeful ignorance of things past amongst young Britons (or Brits). A handy illustration is the hugely popular television series Big Brother that gripped much of the nation last year. Not only did few younger people seem to know where the programme's idea or title came from, but also, they could not have cared less once told. The referent is thus lost and the reference, in this case to Orwell, becomes merely the name.

So proverbs are just going to have to change with the times to survive, I reckon. They are going to have to learn to adapt. That way, they will emerge leaner and fitter. Consequently, I wish to propose, in a modest way, how and where we might bring them up-to-date.
the book club
The Harry Potter series
A.O. Scott
Posted Monday, August 23, 1999, at 4:04 PM PT

From: Polly Shulman  
Subject: Not for Children Only  
Posted Monday, August 23, 1999, at 9:27 AM PT

Dear Tony,

I have to admit, I began the first Harry Potter book in a mood of irritable skepticism. Having worn out flashlight batteries under the blankets since earliest childhood, I've never understood why other grown-ups won't read children's books. Of course, there's plenty of dreck being written for all ages, but the best kids' books--particularly ones by British writers--pull their readers through adventures of the sort that seem to have vanished from serious adult fiction, with compelling inventiveness that's rarely been seen since Lawrence Sterne. (OK, maybe Donald Barthelme and Thomas Pynchon.) Plus, they're a lot easier to read. Peter Dickinson, who writes superb fantasy novels for children, once explained it by saying, "You're not allowed to bore children." And since no one bundles them off into the ghetto of genre when they bring in magic (unless you consider juvenile lit a genre), children's authors can draw on myths and fairy tales to give their books resonance and deeply satisfying structure.

But until this year, it was almost impossible to get any self-respecting adult to read them. Friends would thank me with polite puzzlement when I gave them great children's books I knew they'd love--then would tuck them away in the bookshelves for when their kids were a bit older. If my book-loving peers would rather spend their beach reading on plodding thrillers than on the heart-stopping adventure stories of Philip Pullman (author of the "Dark Materials" trilogy), say, or the scintillating allegory of Norton Juster (The Phantom Tollbooth), then nothing could be done about it, short of reading aloud to them when they were laid up with the flu (which does work, but you lose your voice). So what were these Harry Potter books? Why were healthy adults fighting for them? Could they really be better than the books by Diana Wynne Jones, or E. Nesbit, or T.H. White (I'm sure you can add your own favorites here, Tony), which everybody turned up their noses at?

Well, no, the Harry Potter books aren't better. But that's good news for his fans--it's like saying that Dickens is no better than George Eliot. I'm hoping adults will find a savory spread of great kids' books right beneath their noses, now that they've plucked those noses down from the stratosphere. And I bet kids are turning to other great books while they wait for the next installment.

Harry Potter, the orphan son of a witch and a wizard, gets sent to Hogwarts School forWizards after discovering his own magical powers in the first book in the series, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. This puts him squarely in two time-honored juvenile genres--magic books and school stories. There's even a fine body of literature in the intersection. When I started Rowling's series, I found myself comparing them to JIll Murphy's out-of-print "Worst Witch" books, a series for slightly younger kids (7-to-11-year-olds), about a hapless student at Miss Cackle's Academy for Witches. The two series share lots of obvious details: broom-riding lessons; animal familiars with minds of their own; scary teachers; potions gone wrong; school uniforms that look like Halloween costumes to us Muggles, as Rowling calls nonmagical folks. (I hope Murphy's books will fly back into print on Rowling's robe-tails.) I also thought of Diana Wynne Jones' "Witch Week," one of my all-time favorite books. It's a dark, witty suspense story about an outbreak of illegal magic in a school full of witch orphans--children whose parents have been burned as witches. I was miffed on Jones' and Murphy's accounts (among others) that Rowling was getting all the press.

But soon I was hooked, just like everyone else. The woman has an amazing imagination. She structures the series like one of those Renaissance paintings, with the perspective lines heading off to infinity in all directions, and weird supernatural beings and rock formations in the background, while in the foreground someone in a peculiar hat has an intense interaction with a hippogriff. And she's so funny! Didn't you love the Whomping Willow, the tree on the school grounds that bashes any creature fool enough to touch it, and Peeves, the school poltergeist, whom everyone treats with irritated toleration? Not to mention poor Nearly Headless Nick, the ghost who's not allowed
to ride in the wild headless chase because the ax that did him in was too blunt and left a flap of skin on his neck. I also admire Rowling's talent for balancing humor with serious save-the-world drama, which she does with a far defter hand than Tolkien.

I was impressed with her technique for interweaving her magical world with Muggle life. Her wizard world exists in the interstices of everyday Britain, with its denizens wandering around in a bit of a muddle. Think of that hilarious scene when one of Harry's school friends tries to call him on the telephone and keeps shouting—he can't believe his message is getting through. Wizards, of course, send messages via owl post.

And the books are getting better and better. What did you think of the Dementors, those elegantly symbolic, bone-chilling villains in the latest, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*? They guard Azkaban, the wizard prison, by sucking hope from the prisoners, leaving them in a state of icy despair, as good a description of depression as I've ever read.

Like Harry's nerdy, courageous, always-right friend Hermione, I'm tasting the delicious pleasure of telling everyone I told them so. It's so bad—but it's so good!

Yours,
Polly

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**From:** A.O. Scott  
**Subject:** Harry Potter Is the New Star Wars  
**Posted Monday. August 23, 1999, at 4:04 PM PT**

Dear Polly,

Like you, I began this assignment with a mixture of puzzlement and skepticism. I was, for one thing, suspicious of the media hype—to which we are now, of course, contributing—around these books, and I still dread the eventual movies and the inevitable merchandising frenzy that will follow. My son has just graduated from the Tellytubbies to Arthur, and I fear the day isn't far off when Tinky-Winky and Laa-Laa and D.W. and Francine will have to shove over on his shelves to make way for Aldus Dumbeldore, Hermione Granger, and the other must-have action figures, not to mention the toy broomsticks, wands, owls, and endless other wee wizard paraphernalia sure to flood the market soon. And then there will be the McDonald's Harry Potter Magic Happy Meals, the CD-ROMS, the cut-rate knock-offs, and the other excrescences of kid-culture overkill. Look what they did to poor Winnie-the-Pooh!

I also had to overcome some grownup resistance to the books themselves, mostly owing to the atrophying of my capacity for the kind of flashlight-under-the-covers, breathless absorption you evoke so nicely. That the Harry Potter books restore this capacity with brilliant efficiency must be part of the reason they appeal to adults. But, as you point out, they're hardly unique in this. They're not better than *The Phantom Tollbooth*, or Ursula LeGuin's "Earthsea Trilogy," or T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. Nor are they better (you asked for my favorites) than E.L. Konigsberg's *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, or Louise Fitzhugh's books (*Harriet the Spy* is best known, but the one I remember best is *Nobody's Family Is Going To Change*). But that Harry Potter merits mention in this company suggests that he's the real thing.

I don't know why it is that adult readers—including myself, since my reading life (which is to say, my life) is divided evenly between bedtime stories for younger children and serious adult fiction (plenty of dreck there)—eschew the pleasures these books afford, especially since we are likely to have fond, intense memories of just those pleasures. We try to recapture them with genre schlock, as though the dream world of our youth were a tacky theme park. And yet it's evident that J.K. Rowling is a formidably talented—and, more important, a rigorously competent—novelist, much better at the rudiments of effective fiction writing than any six American novelists under 50. She's meticulous in her plotting, economical in her descriptions, and exact in her portraiture. There's no reason why solid storytelling, brisk prose, and vivid characters should appeal exclusively, or primarily, to children, though children are less likely to submit to being bored, pandered to, preached at, or intimidated.

In each of these books—ingeniously structured around the cycle of the Hogwarts school year—Rowling manages to impart new information about the wizard world (and slyly fill you in in case you've missed the earlier installments, something that will become increasingly important as the series fills its projected seven volumes and sales figures...
mount into the trillions), to advance the long-term narrative conflict (about Harry's search for his origins, and his Manichean struggle with Voldemort, a wizard who's gone over to the Dark Side), and to create and resolve enough satisfying short- and middle-term conundrums to make the volume stand alone.

She also understands the importance of evil, both metaphysical (Voldemort), and human: Petunia and Vernon Dursley, the Muggle aunt and uncle who raise Harry in his orphanhood, along with their doted-on, sublimely piggish son Dudley, are grotesques worthy of Roald Dahl; Draco Malfoy, Harry's nemesis at Hogwarts, and Severus Snape (she's terrific with names), the diabolical potions teacher, are brilliant foils for Harry's flawed, instinctual goodness. And Rowling understands that goodness is not the same as innocence, a concept in which children have no interest (knowing, as adults refuse to, that they are entirely without it). The threesome of Harry, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger (who is likely to be everybody's favorite character) are believably mischievous, competitive, vain, and, for all their intelligence, prone to childish foolishness (e.g. the clever, studious Hermione's stubborn crush on the egotistical charlatan Professor Lockhart in Chamber of Secrets).

The Potter craze, I think, is not unlike the Star Wars phenomenon 22 summers ago, which also took the world somewhat by surprise (although Star Wars was more carefully calculated to appeal to both kids and adults, whereas the adult appetite for Harry's escapades seems to have been anticipated by nobody). Like the first Star Wars movie, the Harry Potter books have an instantly classic, ineffably old-fashioned quality about them. They ingeniously recombine elements of fairy tale, religious allegory (Harry as the chosen one), half-remembered childhood reading, and pop culture (including, fairly explicitly in the case of Potter, the Star Wars cycle itself) into something new, fresh, and irresistible. You feel, somehow, that they have always been there, waiting for you to discover. You also feel, in spite of being one of several million crazed fans, that they were written for you alone, a wizard stranded in an uncomprehending Muggle world, waiting for someone to recognize that what everyone else calls your abnormalities are really powers. This, I think, is the deep appeal of these books (and of a number of the others we've mentioned). They tap into a universal condition of childhood—the sense of being misunderstood, different, special.

But why these books, why now? It's probably a mistake to try to read to much cultural significance into their extraordinary success—just as it would be in the case of Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, Angela's Ashes, or the other out-of-the-blue runaway bestsellers of the past few years. But it must mean something, no? What do you think?

Best,
Tony

From: Polly Shulman
Subject: Rawling As Novelist
Posted Tuesday, August 24, 1999, at 9:53 AM PT

Dear Tony,

Why these books, why now? Boy, that's a hard one. Could be a simple matter of demographics: Boomers' kids are old enough to know what they like and say so, and there are enough of them to give their collective voice a certain volume. Or maybe it's a cyclical thing: Fantasy was last in fashion during the '70s, when (as you point out) Star Wars had its astonishing apotheosis. Is it coming back like platform shoes? Or maybe the explanation is Rowling's quick, enchanted pen—she's turned out three Potter stories in two years, leaving her readers no time to lose their appetites. Or could it be our ambivalence about the recent furious surge of moody technology, giving us apparently magical powers that we can't quite control? Or is someone at Scholastic a secret marketing genius? Or is Rowling herself a wizard? What's your pet theory?

I wonder whether it's true, as you claim, that children are less likely than adults to put up with being preached at. The authors of children's books on the whole certainly don't seem to think so. Classics like Little Women and The Secret Garden preach shamelessly without losing their passionate young groupies, even today. Kids, after all, get plenty of lectures ("discipline," "limits") from their beloved parents. The more recent crop of books continue to preach, though they promote psychological health rather than moral rectitude. American writers are far worse in

this respect than the Brits--even Konigsberg and Fitzhugh, whom I love as you do, can occasionally sound like
guidance counselors. Maybe one of the reasons Rowling hit it big with grown-ups is her refusal to drum in lessons.
Instead, her books get their depth from a combination of allegory and genuine human interactions that haven't
been pre-chewed. She lets her characters learn from their mistakes (or fail to do so). Adults like that--they're can
dish out the preaching, but they can't take it.

One of the pleasures of reading Rowling as a grown-up, which you touch on, is seeing her develop as a novelist.
The first book had a simplistic dramatic trajectory: Harry is sure he knows who are the good guys and who are the
bad guys, but he guesses wrong. In the second book, I thought at first that she was pulling the same trick, but I
should have trusted her. The apparent villain really is a villain, of sorts--but she adds surprises. As we learn more
and more clearly in each volume, there are lots of ways to help the forces of darkness: You can join them with all
your heart, but you can also succumb to prejudice, or self-righteousness, or some apparently silly temptation. As
Hagrid, the gruff-but-loveable caretaker, makes clear, you can love the wrong kind of folks (in his case, dragons
and monstrous spiders). Or you can just be a vain goofball. In each book, the enemy's helpers become increasingly
refined.

The series also has some of the excitement that Dickens' readers must have felt as they read his novels in serial
form, knowing he was home working frantically on the next installment. Publishing the first books before she's
written the later ones, Rowling hunts out bits and pieces from earlier on and puts them to new uses. The
Whomping Willow, for example, which seems like a bit of inspired slapstick in Volume 1, has an important gesture
to make in Volume 3, furthering the plot. One tiny character introduced in the first book swells to chilling
proportions at the end of the third. It's like watching Rowling rummage around for mice and rats to enchant into
horses and coachmen. Amazingly, none of it seems artificial.

I wonder how she's going to handle the Great Battle that comes with the genre, where Good meets Bad for
something like a final showdown. So far, she's given us small (if important) skirmishes, and sketched out a grand
battle past. The danger of series like this is that they can so easily collapse at the end, becoming too allegorically
complex or too morally simple. How do you think she'll handle it?

And do you think Percy, Ron Weasley's perfect prefect/head boy/big brother, will play a villainous role in one of the
next books? I hope so.

From: A.O. Scott
Subject: Will There Be Trouble With Harry?
Posted Tuesday, August 24, 1999, at 2:12 PM PT

Dear Polly,

According to a clipping from the Daily Telegraph passed along by our editor (a gifted sorceress in her own right),
there are now British editions of the Harry Potter books designed especially for adult consumers. The content is
the same, of course, but the grown-up version cost about two pounds more than the kids' version, and, I presume,
looks more sober and serious. Twenty-five thousand have been sold. I thought this was funny, but then again
when I was reading these books in public places in preparation for our chat I would make sure to have a notebook
and pencil and even my laptop handy, to make clear to the utterly indifferent
world
that I was working, which
probably made me look even sillier.

I take your point about kids and preaching, though I think that they tend to tolerate the moral if the story is good
enough. But then again, they may learn their morals in part from the stories they hear. I do suspect (you imply that
you do, too) that the boomer parents who so gleefully force-feed their kids lesson-heavy, humorless, politically
correct books seize upon the Potter novels because they're so blessedly free of didacticism. Of course, there are
subtle warnings against prejudice and snobbery (as embodied by the odious Malfoy clan), and affirmations of the
virtues of honesty and friendship. But there is also ample recognition of the fact that it's sometimes necessary to
break the rules, talk back to your teachers, or fling a fistful of mud at someone who pisses you off. This flexible,
realistic moral sense coexists with reassurances that the important moral categories are, in the end, "stable. Good
and evil exist in this world, and their struggle for dominance is what makes it go around.

I agree that the books get better and better, and that as you proceed from one to the next the series acquires
more richness and density of detail. One of the neatest tricks Rowling pulls off is to make the narrative move backward and forward at the same time: Part of the drama of each installment involves Harry's finding out something new about his parents' deaths, and about the world of Hogwarts in their time. (Hogwarts seems to be the center of the wizard world. Not only is every wizard presumably a graduate--unless we learn about a rival academy in a later volume--but a surprising number of the best pupils seem to return as teachers.) And there is a lovely mirroring of past and present--an almost typological reflection between yesterday and today. Harry's rivalry with Malfoy is foreshadowed by his father's rivalry with Snape, who is still around to torment the son of his tormentor. And the themes of loyalty, friendship, and betrayal that Harry uncovers in the story of his parents' demise (a story about which we still have much to learn), cast their shadow on his friendships with Hermione and Ron. The petty tensions between them that begin to unfold in *Prisoner of Azkaban* may be the harbinger of something more catastrophic in future books.

I wondered, as you did, about Percy the Prefect, Ron's older brother, who becomes Head Boy in *Azkaban*. In *Chamber of Secrets* he began behaving oddly, and it seemed as though he might be harboring thoughts of the Dark Side. And I think (I hope) he still may be headed there: the great, corrupting sin in this moral universe seems to be ambition, which Percy clearly possesses. But so might Harry. Lord Voldemort (whose name is never uttered by wizards with less temerity than Harry and Dumbledore) is, like Darth Vader or Milton's Satan, a classic rebel angel, undone by his lust for power. And he may decide at some point that it's better to co-opt the blessed Harry than to annihilate him. (Dumbledore's benevolent but strict theology, involving the operations of free will in a supernaturally determined world, is classically Miltonian--an odd note of Protestantism in this decidedly pagan cosmos.) It is always the favorites who turn evil in this kind of story. It seems to me that Harry's final confrontation with the dark forces will have to involve his overcoming the temptation to join them. There is an inkling of this possibility early on, when the sorang hat, which places new students in their residential houses, tries to entice Harry to join Slytherin, where baddies like Snape and Malfoy hang out. Harry is promised greatness if he chooses their company, but he opts for goodness and joins Gryffindor, his father's house, instead.

Still, I suspect he'll face this dilemma again before long. After all, Harry is not only a 10-year-old celebrity, and a favorite with the Hogwarts faculty (Snape excepted); he's a gifted athlete on the Quidditch pitch (how to explain? It's the wizard pastime, something like three games of lacrosse played simultaneously on broomsticks, with magic balls), and a natural leader among his peers. His decency has for now held his pride in check, but this might (should, I daresay) change. I don't think the series can continue to be as interesting if the menaces he faces continue to be strictly external. The deeper darkness is within. Before long Harry's terror and revulsion at Voldemort and what he represents may be overcome by curiosity, and his veneration of his martyred parents may be colored with doubt, even anger. The fact that each book so far allows him a greater measure of fallibility--and that some characters seem to slip and slide in the twilight zone between benign and malevolent wizardry--suggests that Rowling may be aware of these possibilities. In any case, I trust her to keep us enchanted.

And let's not forget that Harry has, at the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, just turned 13. We have four books to go, and the stirrings of puberty can't be far off. What is wizard adolescence like? Adolescence of any kind is risky territory for the "young adult" book writer, perhaps especially in the United States at the present time. How will Rowling handle the dark magic of sexuality? Hogwarts is coed, after all, and there's also the proud tradition of English boarding school buggery to consider. Will Harry and Hermione get it on? Hermione and Ron? Ron and Harry? Does a cracking voice mess up your spells? Is there a potion to cure acne? Do wizards ever date muggles?

Can you divine the future? I await the magic owl bearing your answer to these vital questions.

Best,
Tony

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**From:** Polly Shulman  
**Subject:** Harry in Love?  
**Posted Wednesday, August 25, 1999, at 7:49 AM PT**

Dear Tony,

You raise a truly terrifying specter--romance. Harry and Hermie sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G? Eight-year-olds around the world will turn queasy at the thought. Of course, we did get the first glimmerings of it in *Chamber of*...
Secrets, when Hermione—along with half the girls at Hogwarts and everybody's mom—go all dewy-eyed at the thought of Gilderoy Lockhart, that god-awful blowhard of a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, the one with the perfect profile. (Rowling, please! You're giving girldkind a bad name.) In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, there are hints that Harry's sweet on Cho Chang, who plays the same position he does on Ravenclaw's Quidditch team. She's a fourth year, which makes her an older woman. Then there's the littlest Weasley, Ginny, who conceives a crush on Harry early in Book 1. It gets her into trouble in Book 2—evidently, wanting to make a good impression on your beloved is another impulse that can inadvertently put you in the hands of darkness. Is there more story to be milked there? Ginny, for example, could turn into a knockout in Book 5, when she should be 14 or so, winning—too late—the hitherto impermeable heart of Potter, then extracting just revenge by scorning him utterly, sending him off on a quixotic love-quest just when he's most needed to save the world. No? I doubt it, too, but it's a thought. I'm more inclined to look for the sexpots of supernatural tradition: sirens, vampires, various enchantresses, those green ladies with rotten or serpentine lower bodies—what are they called?—who show up in (for example) Coleridge's "Christobel." Can you see Harry and his rival Malfoy vying for the attentions of a mermaid? Well, whatever Rowling does with sexuality, you can be sure it'll be funny.

We know that wizards date muggles, from time to time—I'm pretty sure some of the kids are products of mixed marriages. (Can't remember who, though.) That's an interesting idea—Rowling could bring in a young muggle hero. It needn't be a love interest; it could just be someone with whom frustrated readers lacking all magical talents can identify. Someone utterly unmagical who nevertheless enters the wizard world and makes a difference. I agree with you that we all know ourselves to be misunderstood magicians trapped in a horribly mundane world. (This is particularly true in childhood, but I'm not over it yet—are you?) Still, there's that nasty inner voice that reveals in whispering words of reason, and I, for one, believe it, too—it makes a plausible case that you and I are ordinary people after all. So Rowling might do us a service by writing a place for us. (Well, me, anyway. You're clearly a real magician.)

I'll be astonished (though delighted) if any of the characters turn out to be gay. Bet you a silver sickle the homosexual themes are treated with sublimation and symbolism.

As far as Harry's being tempted by power, I see what you mean, but I don't really think that's where the series is headed. We've seen it so often before—Saruman in *Lord of the Rings*, Milton's irritating Satan, even Voldemort himself—and Harry isn't the type. He's too ordinary. Sure, he loves winning at Quidditch, but he's just not into power. Or fame, even, really—remember how grossed out he gets (as does the reader) when Gilderoy Lockhart gives him tips for grabbing the spotlight? I say his failings will be less about power, more about love. In *The Sorcerer's Stone*, he's tempted by a mirror that shows the viewer's heart's desire. Gazing in it, Harry sees his family dwelling away, and sneaks back for another fix whenever he gets the chance. I think he's more of a kind of temptation than by a hunger for power. Voldemort could pose as the guardian of Harry's heritage, as someone who loves him. But you could be right about Harry's anger towards his parents—they did leave him dramatically in the lurch, after all, despite saving his life. I'd sure be mad if I had to go live with that aunt, uncle, and cousin.

I'm looking forward to learning more about the four houses that make up the school. There are the ambitious Slytherins, the brainy Ravenclaws, the "just and loyal" Hufflepuffs, and the house with all our heroes, Gryffindor, "where dwell the brave at heart." It's not immediately clear why the Sorting Hat puts people in the houses it chooses. For example, wouldn't you guess scholarly Hermione would belong in Ravenclaw? And I'm still waiting to find out what's so brave about poor Neville Longbottom, who keeps losing his pet toad, getting scolded by his grandmother, and cowering in corridors. What's he doing in Gryffindor? He does have a brave moment when he stands up to his friends—he thinks they're up to no good—but it's not quite enough. So far, we don't know many Ravenclaws or Hufflepuffs. I'd like to see a book in which Rowling calls upon the strengths of each house—even Slytherin—to aid Harry in his epic struggle.

What would you like to see? Got any suggestions for the divine enchantress?

Best,
Polly
From: A.O. Scott  
Subject: Harry in the New World  
Posted Wednesday, August 25, 1999, at 10:08 AM PT

Dear Polly,

Though the series' Britishness is vital to its charm and appeal, I'd like to know what the wizards beyond the shores of Albion are up to. We do hear about the elder Weasley brothers who work in Romania and Egypt--obvious enough magical places--but I'd love it if Rowling could inject a bit of Tintin-style globe-trotting into the Potter saga. What if the Hogwarts took a year to study abroad in, say, the United States? What are the witches of Texas like, or Brooklyn, or Salt Lake City, or Salem, Mass.? Or are we a nation of muggles after all? Do American wizards play a sport superficially like Quidditch, but with a completely different, and to the British wizards utterly incomprehensible, set of rules? Do they prefer eagles or pterodactyls instead of owls? Or maybe, if the stateside magic kingdom is too much to contemplate, the next Defence Against Dark Arts Master (there's a new one each book, just to mix things up) could be a voodoo priestess from New Orleans or a Wiccan from Northampton.

I'd also like to know more about the political economy and social organization of the magic world. There seems to be a class system of sorts--aristocrats like the Malfoys at one end, cockneys like Hagrid and the knightbus drivers in Prisoner of Azkaban at the other, with struggling middle-class civil-servant types like the Weasleys in the middle. (Intellectuals like the Hogwarts masters are, as ever, a class unto themselves.) But where do these distinctions come from? What is the source of the wealth that sits in Gringotts bank? Is all that coveted Quidditch gear made by workers in offshore magic sweatshops? Are they unionized? What is the structure of wizard government? Who appointed Minister Fudge? I'll stop, but it's testimony to the fertility of Rowling's imagination that these seem like plausible and interesting questions, and ones I bet she'd have answers to. Perhaps someday she'll publish a concordance to Harry Potter and explain it all.

Meanwhile, I don't see Harry falling for a succubus (I think that's the word you were looking for). Hagrid might, though, what with his affection for dangerous monsters. Funny that all of the Hogwarts teachers seem to be single.

Which brings me to an intriguing point in your letter. I owe you a silver sickle, since it seems plain to me that the homosexual themes are already there, and treated with the sublimation and symbolism you predict. Well, not homosexual themes per se, since whatever sexuality there is in the books is conventionally and safely infantile. What I mean is that being a wizard is very much like being gay: You grow up in a hostile world governed by codes and norms that seem nonsensical to you, and you discover at a certain age that there are people like you--what's more, there's a whole subculture with its own codes and norms right alongside the straight (muggle) one, yet strangely invisible to it. In out-of-the-way spots in the middle of large cities are secret places--bars, bookshops--that cater to this special clientele, and suddenly, one day, you find your way to them. The reaction of many straights (muggles) is hostility and denial, on the order of the Dursleys. But some muggle parents, like Hermione's, love their wizard children and support them. (Hermione reciprocates by taking a course at Hogwarts in muggle studies, the one moment in the series that made me laugh out loud.) Consider too that there are wizards born of muggles and muggles born of wizards, so that having magical power (like being gay, at least according to some schools of thought) is, while not hereditary, clearly innate. Your use of the phrase "a place for us" was especially suggestive (though by "us" you meant the muggles), since that's the title of a fascinating book by D.A. Miller (published last year by Harvard) about the role of the Broadway musical in forming, at once in secret and out in plain view, modern gay male cultural identity. The process of acculturation he describes (which involves playing the cast album from Gypsy in your parents' suburban basement), is not unlike what Harry undergoes in the early chapters of Sorcerer's Stone.

Is this completely crazy? I won't be offended if you say yes. Will Jerry Falwell now take out after Harry Potter, having raised the alarm about Tinky Winky? Our dear colleague Chatterbox, that estimable muggle, thinks he might, but for other reasons, namely that the Potter books take a benign view of paganism, magic, witchcraft, and other things that scare Christian fundamentalists. A few years ago they went after Barney because he could fly, and because he taught kids about the powers of the imagination (in their crusade they had the tacit support of parents across America, who are fully prepared to believe that the purple dinosaur is the instrument of Satan). There have also been outcries raised about Dungeons and Dragons, and about the mere use of the word "imagination" in school textbooks. So I'm sure it's only a matter of time before school libraries start getting calls from concerned parents complaining about our dear Harry. Which makes me like him all the more, of course.

That's it! On their year abroad in the United States, Harry and his pals fall afoul of the local Christian Coalition-
dominated school board in a small Kansas town where they've come in search of Dumbledore's old teacher, the Wonderful Wizard of Oz, and Minerva MacGonagall goes head to head with Pat Robertson on Nightline. What do you think?

Best,
Tony

From: Polly Shulman
Subject: Harry's Magic Pride
Posted Thursday, August 26, 1999, at 10:31 AM PT

Brilliant, Tony, brilliant! I love your interpretation of the wizard world as parallel to the gay world—the young wizard's gradual recognition of his difference, the sudden revelation that there are tons of other people like him. Do you see a Magic Pride movement starting, with witches and wizards insisting that muggles accept them and grant them civil rights? I'm longing to go to the Magic Pride March—imagine the floats and costumes!

I like your idea of foreign wizardry, too. Did you ever read Kingdoms of Elfin, by Sylvia Townsend Warner? It's another out-of-print work of genius that could plausibly come back on the wind of Harry's success. Warner wrote a series of stories—I think, but I'm not sure, that a lot of them were published in The New Yorker in the '70s—about communities of fairies living in various countries. They're partly exquisite little parodies of travel lit, partly cruel little fables. As usual, try getting a grown-up to read them—you can hear them muttering "Fairies? Come on!" in their heads. But these stories are certainly not children's literature: The fairies are heartless and creepy (which makes them human enough that they're weirdly touching). In Elfhame, in Scotland, here's how they treat changelings:

Every day a fasting weasel bites the child's neck and drinks its blood for three minutes. The amount of blood drunk by each successive weasel (who is weighed before and after the drinking) is replaced by the same weight of a distillation of dew, soot, andaconite. Though the blood-to-ichor transfer does not cancel human nature (the distillation is only approximate: elfin blood contains several unanalyzable components, one of which is believed to be magnetic air), it gives considerable longevity; ... "Dear little thing," said Tiphaine [the queen of Elfhame; all Warner's elfin kingdoms are matriarchies]. "I hope he won't age prematurely." For when grey hairs appear on the head of a changeling he is put out of the hill to make the rest of his way through the human world; which is why we see so many grey-haired beggars on the roads.

Or this:

The Elfin Court of Zuy, in the Low Countries, was wealthy and orderly. No winter gales penetrated its polished windows; if the summer sun shone too vehemently, blinds were pulled down to protect the furnishings. Drinking bouts were long, taciturn, and ended in somnolence. The Queen was celebrated for her pearls.

It would be fun to take a school trip with the Hogwarters and see what details Rowling would assemble to build national styles of wizardry. But I think your other scenario—a foreign teacher joins Hogwarts—is much more likely. Notice how Rowling structures the books in strict parallel centered around the school: First we get a few chapters of Harry at home with his awful muggle relatives, who lock him in the closet, starve him, and cower at the thought that he might perform magic (his frustration at not being allowed to is part of the amusement of this section). Then we get a visit to Diagon Alley, a hidden street in London where witches and wizards shop for this year's school supplies. Then the trip to Hogwarts, generally on the Hogwarts Express, which leaves from the invisible Platform Nine and Three-Quarters at King's Cross. At Hogwarts, we get the rhythms of the school year: the classes, new teachers, spells gone wrong, midnight feasts, Quidditch competitions, bad marks for mischief, exams, Christmas break, and so on. At some point, usually the climax, we visit the Forbidden Forest, a spot of hazard and wonder, right on school grounds. What's amazing is how Rowling manages to cleave strictly to this formula, yet provide such a wealth of new details and such deep, dangerous plots that every book seems completely new. It's a trick other people have used—P.L. Travers, in the Mary Poppins books, for example, always has a chapter in which one of the kids loses her temper, one in which we visit a relative of Mary Poppins' for tea, one in which Mary has a birthday, and so on. But Rowling isn't just writing independent chapters—her novels have an overall trajectory that deepens and develops from book to book. It's as if she's writing a sequence of sonnets.
(Not a succubus, by the way. A succubus is a female demon that comes to you in the night while you're asleep and has sex with you against your will. I was thinking of a monster that looks like an ordinary woman, until you see her legs—which she doesn't have. Instead, there's a snake tail, or a puddle of oozing rot. I've seen her called a melusine, but I think there's another name. Maybe one of our readers can think of it?)

I'm still interested in hearing your thoughts about the question you posed a few messages back: Why Harry, why now?

Best,
Polly

From: Polly Shulman  
Subject: Clarification  
Posted Thursday, August 26, 1999, at 12:33 PM PT

It's not a succubus or a melusine, it's a lamia, as reader Mark H. Nelson points out in his message. Thank you, Mark.

From: A.O. Scott  
Subject: Is Harry the Savior of English Literature?  
Posted Thursday, August 26, 1999, at 1:00 PM PT

Dear Polly,

Thanks for the tip about Sylvia Townsend Warner. I'll check the library for Kingdoms of Elfin, which sounds marvelously creepy. And imagine confusing a succubus with a lamia! I'm so ashamed. Five points from Gryffindor!

I see that the question I lobbed casually in your direction on Monday has bounced back like a bludger (or do I mean a quaffle? I'm still a novice at Quidditch) to knock me off my rhetorical broomstick. Why Harry, why now? An obvious answer, which we've gestured toward in various ways this week, is just that the books are a lot of fun to read. Your analysis of their narrative structure, by the way, was incisive. The sonnet sequence analogy is inspired: With each book you become newly aware of the tight structural constraints Rowling is working in, and freshly amazed at the dazzling variations she manages. Each time, for instance, I'm sure that Snape is the link to Voldemort, and each time I'm stunned when he turns out to be nothing more than a garden-variety classroom sadist. And yet I know I'll fall for this trick again and again, and that the moment I don't will be the moment his true evil--or his unsuspected goodness--is revealed. I'm impressed with how effortlessly Rowling balances the genre requirements of predictability--Harry will prevail, the school year will end, Voldemort will be foiled (but only temporarily!)--and surprise.

But as we know, a book's quality and its success are two different things. Some of the hype about Harry Potter seems a bit wild: You'd think, reading newspaper stories about...
these books, that they had single-handedly rescued literacy in the English-speaking world, and also bridged the gap between parents and children. Talk about magic! Nearly every article I've seen quotes a parent or teacher saying something to the effect of "My kid never showed any interest in reading until Harry Potter came along," with the implication that the kid will now trade Pokemon for *The Iliad* and our civilization will be saved from the forces of darkness. The jacket flap of the British edition of *Prisoner of Azkaban* sports a handwritten letter from an 8-year-old begging Rowling to write more books. It's a bit much, really.

Adults who have children partake of a great deal of kid culture, voluntarily or not, and inevitably develop tastes and interests of their own. I'm as obsessed with Arthur as I used to be with Seinfeld. My wife, who is a schoolteacher, has developed an insatiable appetite for young-adult historical fiction quite independent of the professional requirements of keeping up with what her students are reading, finding new texts to assign, and so forth. Part of the fun of having (or teaching) children is the vicarious reliving of one's own childhood--reading the stories aloud that you remember having read to you, renting videotapes of the movies that enchanted you or gave you nightmares, reconnecting with Ernie and Bert.

That Rowling's books, which are so smart and so bracingly British (I think you're right to keep bringing up P.L. Travers as a reference point--she and Rowling both manage to be at once subversive and starchy, anarchic and commonsensical), have resonated with parents is no surprise. She quite cannily sets Harry's adventures in an England whose culture and geography are entirely literary. This is not the England of Tony Blair or Princess Di or Martin Amis, but the England we remember from other children's books, an England somehow perpetually Edwardian, notwithstanding certain concessions to modernity like telephones and coeducation.

In an earlier posting you speculated that our enthusiasm for Harry Potter may arise from our anxiety about technology, and it's striking (this is something my wife called to my attention after she read the first two books) how technologically underdeveloped the muggle world is in these books, in particular with respect to information technology. No e-mail, no faxes, not really any television or movies. And of course the wizard world is a world of artisanal handicraft, ancient wisdom, and small, local businesses. Hogwarts pupils don't buy their textbooks from Amazon.com or a Barnes & Noble superstore but from a quaint old bookshop on Diagon Alley called Flourish and Blotts. They don't have e-mail; they have owls. They don't play Nintendo; they practice spells. (They do, however, collect famous wizard trading cards, which move, just as all wizard photographs do. But, curiously, wizard photography seems to be exclusively black and white.)

So there is a double nostalgia involved in reading these books--nostalgia for one's own childhood and nostalgia for the timeless realm of classic children's fiction. Rowling has cleverly, and subtly, modernized these realms with respect to matters like gender equality and multiculturalism--not that she makes a big fuss about such things. Of course, this being children's-book England, there's still a servant class. But though there's plenty of cruelty, corporal punishment has fallen from favor. (The death penalty seems to be reserved for wayward magical beasts.)
Of course, none of this explains why these books have crossed over not only from children to their parents but also to adults who don't have children. This seems genuinely unprecedented, and it may be one of those inexplicable phenomena the culture likes to toss our way every now and then. (Our seeker ducks the bludger and sprints for the golden snitch!) Or it may be a symptom of our present obsession with childhood and children—the simultaneous detonation of the postwar baby boom and the fin de siècle baby boom. All I know is I haven't had such a purely escapist reading experience in a long time.

As much fun as it was to read these books, it's been even more fun discussing them with you. I'm quite dazzled by your insight and erudition—bewitched, in fact.

All best,
Tony

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Chapter One

Pottermania: Good, Clean Fun or Cultural Hegemony?

Tammy Turner-Vorbeck

Pottermania has become a cultural phenomenon. The Harry Potter books, the Harry Potter movie, the related media publicity, and an expanding selection of heavily marketed paraphernalia permeate our popular culture and have significant societal implications for children and for child culture. This cultural phenomenon reaches far beyond its seductive surface appearance of good, clean, fantastical childhood fun (Monk, 2000; Papinchak, 2000) into a darker place where the psyche of American children, both collectively and individually, is made vulnerable and their process of identity construction, their beliefs, and their childhoods are for sale.

The purposeful infringement on and manipulation of children and child culture by corporate interests is both serious and alarming and it deserves critical examination. This chapter seeks to frame such a critical examination through both sociological and cultural studies perspectives. The cultural commercialization of childhood and the Neo-Marxist view of the role of media in creating cultural hegemony will be discussed. The Harry Potter books participate in cultural hegemony by featuring social normative messages and middle-class cultural hierarchies. Finally, human agency and the possibility for resistance to the preponderance of commodity fetishism, of which Harry Potter is an example, is considered.

The Cultural Commercialization of Childhood

Corporate consumerism is increasingly targeting child culture. Contemporary elements of child culture, such as television, movies, and computer games, were created in the age of late capitalism and have always been closely associated with marketing tactics, such as print advertising and commercials in the electronic media. Recently, however, the traditional icons of child culture, such as children's literature, toys, art, and music, have been
and continue to be increasingly infiltrated and manipulated through the skillfully crafted images of marketing and media giants such as the Disney Corporation. “Disney’s all-encompassing reach into the spheres of economics, consumption, and culture” (Giroux, 1998, p. 63). Pottermania has reached the level of cultural phenomenon that deserves similar consideration. Like Disney’s before (and probably after) the Harry Potter phenomenon, one need only stroll through the aisles of any large, American department store to find evidence of Pottermania’s impending legacy on the images of childhood.

In their book Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood, Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998) critique the corporate construction of childhood and state:

Using fantasy and desire, corporate functionaries have created a perspective on late-twentieth-century culture that melds with business ideologies and free-market values. The worldviews produced by corporate advertisers to some degree always let children know that the most exciting things life can produce are produced by your friends in corporate America. The economics lesson is powerful when it is repeated hundreds of thousands of times. (p. 4)

Should it be alarming that a fundamental element of childhood, such as the pleasure of reading a good book, is now targeted by those who seek to shape the collective imagination of an identifiable demographic buying unit en masse? The Harry Potter phenomenon, or Pottermania, presents a focal point through which to consider this and related questions. The fact that the Harry Potter books and their associated paraphernalia are cultural products created and produced by adults for consumption by children is clear. These cultural products and elements of child culture contain powerful messages of what constitutes social and cultural normalcy and they, therefore, call for continuing critique.

When children’s identities and child culture are used as the means to the end of creating the consummate future consumer, one must seriously question the proclaimed innocuousness of Pottermania. Henry Giroux warns in his book Stealing Innocence that “as culture becomes increasingly commercialized, the only type of citizenship that adult society offers to children is that of consumerism” (2000, p. 19). This notion holds significant implications for not only relationships between adults and children but also for the future of our society as a whole.

The fact that children today are living in a postmodern world facilitates corporate consumerism’s full frontal attack on child culture. Strinati (1993) describes postmodernism as the breakdown of the distinction between culture and society. The idea is that popular cultural signs and media images increasingly dominate our sense of reality and the way we define ourselves and the world around us (p. 360). Kellner (1998) argues that child culture’s traditional artifacts are being replaced and manipulated by media culture artifacts. He is concerned that:

a commercially produced and dominated youth culture has replaced traditional artifacts of children’s culture. In this media youth culture, popular music, television, film, and video and computer games create new idols, aspirations, and artifacts that profoundly influence the thought and behavior of contemporary youth. (p. 85)

Our postmodern children are living in a state that Baudrillard (1983) calls hyperreality in which simulation and appearance come to be more “real” and meaningful to children than substance and reality. Children are continually bombarded with information and supersaturated by the media. Disney is a classic representation of corporate consumerism meets the postmodern world. Giroux writes that Baudrillard “has captured the scope and power of Disney’s influence by arguing that Disneyland is more ‘real’ than fantasy because it now provides an image upon which America constructs itself” (1998, p. 55). But what is the significance of corporate consumerism’s targeting of child culture when children today are living in a postmodern hyperreality? The answer to this inquiry lies in the interrelationship of our culture and societal institutions and the divergent individual ways these are mediated by children.

A Neo-Marxist Perspective on the Media

Although long criticized for its overly deterministic and reductionist emphasis, Marxism is nonetheless able to lead its central tenets for a useful critical examination of societal and cultural phenomenon. Marxist critical theory can be used to examine Pottermania and explore the questions concerning the significance of its impact upon our culture and our society. “Marxist critical theory draws our attention to the issue of political and economic interests in the mass media and highlight social inequalities in media representations” (Chandler, 2001, p. 14).

A central tenet of Neo-Marxism affirms “Cultures are structured in ways that enable the dominant group holding power to have the maximum
control with the minimum of conflict" (Lye, 1997, p. 1). In this light, ideas of the way things are and how the world should and does work are taught for legitimization of the current order of society. Cultural values and practices are constructed to appear normal and natural, rendering them beyond question. Thus, when Pottermania features corporations imprinting upon and manipulating children and child culture, it is not viewed as anything unusual or threatening. The books and related products are seen as good, clean, capitalist fun rather than something sinister in need of perlustration.

Childhood and child culture represent prime opportunities for exercising such ideological control." Woodson (1999) states:

Children are a prerequisite for cultural reproduction over time and childhood literally exists as the site of enculturation. Adults and social institutions are invested in ascribing meaning onto and into childhood in order to maintain social order and the socialization of children negotiates not only behavior patterns but also identity formation. (p. 3)

Inasmuch as diligent awareness and governance over what takes place at this "site of enculturation" seems paramount, yet, these approaches simply do not occur when cultural phenomena such as Pottermania are uncritically received and viewed as part of the natural landscape of American childhood. According to Chandler (2001), Neo-Marxist Louis Althusser:

Introduced the concept of a mechanism of interpellation, whereby subjects (produced by culture) are constituted as the effects of pre-given structures. Ideology functions to constitute individuals (produced by nature) as subjects. Individuals are interpellated (have social identities conferred upon them) primarily through "ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), including the family, schooling, and the mass media. It is through ISAs that people gain both a sense of identity and an understanding of reality. (p. 7)

Pottermania can and should be examined through this sort of Neo-Marxist lens to consider the political and social functions of these mass media texts. As Chandler (2001) describes, "the subject (viewer, listener, reader) is constituted by the text and the power of the mass media resides in its ability to 'position' the subject in such a way that their representation are taken to be reflections of everyday reality." (p. 7).

Most scholars of child culture believe that children are participants in their own cultural production and expression. Similarly, they contend that the ways in which children interpret media are subject to their daily life experiences and environment. This notion is synchronous with the perspective of Cultural Marxism whose primary figure is a contemporary Stuart Hall. Using Althusser's premises, Hall (1982) argues that the media appear to reflect reality when, in fact, they construct it. Hall supports Althusser's idea that the mass media do reproduce interpretations (from ideas that are embedded in symbols and cultural practices) that serve the interests of the ruling class, but he also supports the idea that the mass media are a field of ideological struggle. However, how much struggle is really possible when confronted with a capitalist marketing machine that seduces its public through normative messages consisting of comfortable, familiar images and the appearance of "good, clean fun?" Is it realistic to believe that child culture can be a place of ideological struggle in the face of commodity fetishism?

Commodity Fetishism

The infringement of consumerism on child culture is particularly evident in the mass marketing of the Harry Potter products. Far beyond the Harry Potter books currently published by Scholastic, Inc., we now have the Harry Potter movies from Warner Brothers (of AOL Time Warner), which are also to be available on DVD for private use and ownership. This first, wildly successful movie is scheduled to be followed by other Harry Potter movie sequels. Available for sale is a movie poster book, a movie soundtrack, a wall calendar, postcard books, sticker books, a guidebook to the world of Harry Potter, a Harry Potter Uno card game, carrying cases, glow-in-the-dark puzzles, board games, video games, magic sets, books of spells, Hogwarts House Watches, a Golden Snitch puzzle, Harry Potter boxer shorts, Harry Potter action figures, Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, the textbooks that the character of Harry Potter used in the Harry Potter books, and even a Harry Potter leather embossed trunk to "store books, clothes, and more."

The proliferation of these items constitute a blatant exploitation of the genuine excitement for children's literature that stems from children's true interests. In the effort to create more profits for its shareholders, conglomerates, such as AOL Time Warner, which holds distribution rights to Harry Potter products, supersaturate the marketplace with every conceivable spin-off product. In addition to the products themselves, these media giants use their distribution channels, which they also own and operate, to supersaturate the media with advertisements and news stories for their products. For example, when Warner Brother's studios makes an
investment, as it did by purchasing the movie rights for *Harry Potter*, it can then turn to its sister companies within the same organization to help ensure the movie's profitability. They can make a short story run in the widely respected periodical *Time* magazine describing the "phenomenon" of Harry Potter and how children in the United Kingdom are wildly enthusiastic about the books. Then, AOL's CNN news subsidiary begins making headlines about the "phenomenon." Shortly after the "phenomenon" makes headlines, Pottermania is scheduled for a special interest segment in primetime news on CNN and also on CNN Classroom, bringing the "phenomenon" directly to the children in schools. Perhaps AOL's *People* magazine also concurrently runs a biography on J. K. Rowling. *Fortune* and *Money* magazines could also be called upon for support as they are all controlled by the same megacorporation, AOL Time Warner. Once the "phenomenon" takes root, AOL Time Warner has vast advertising capabilities within its own reach. Commercial advertising begins on its own TBS Superstation, TNT, and The Cartoon Network. In all, AOL Time Warner boasts access in one form or another to over 100 million U.S. households. It creates and then supports the phenomenon of Pottermania.

This is an example of the business model concept of vertical integration in which megacorporations control the entire process of distribution. By using its vast enterprise to *influence* popular culture with Pottermania, the conglomerate then controls every commercial aspect of Pottermania and they, therefore, "own" a significant segment of popular culture. The insidious nature of all of this is that these corporations not only own a segment of popular culture through their control of the commodity but also they created *the fetishism*—the need, the desire, and the very market—for that commodity! Such commodity fetishism is even modeled in the *Harry Potter* books themselves as the children among the characters long to purchase particular kinds of brooms and trading cards.

The fundamental implication at work here is that there need be nothing aesthetically valuable or unique about that upon which an imposed phenomenon is generated. Is it something special about the *Harry Potter* books that has caused such a sensation or is the sensation artificially manufactured and simply centered around them? An understanding of commodity fetishism supports the latter position. If the *Harry Potter* books were, indeed, worthy of such widespread adulation, then the support for them would have naturally risen up from the people rather than being pushed down upon them by mass media marketing.

Corporate consumerism's mass marketing of manufactured cultural products does not simply represent its infringement upon and control over the articles of child culture; it also involves exercising control over the imaginations of children. When children are no longer able to sit with a book and create its images, sounds, voices, smells, and sensations from their own act of reading, they have been robbed of the free use of their own minds. Take the example of a third grader who has seen all of the media hype for the *Harry Potter* movie on television and in print advertisements along with the related products brought to school by her classmates. She considers herself deprived as she is one of the last students in her class who has still not seen the *Harry Potter* movie. She pleads with her parents to go and see the movie and, after doing so, she decides to buy the first *Harry Potter* book in the series. She sits down to read the book with the images from the advertising, the commercials, the movie, and the product spin-offs all swirling around in her mind, creating even more anticipation. She then emerges within thirty minutes from her bedroom to announce to her parents that the book is nothing like she expected and she is bored with it. This is the story of my own eight-year-old daughter.

What is the moral of this story? Once a cultural phenomenon such as Pottermania takes hold, the majority of children are destined to find their first exposure not to the authentic items of child culture (in this case, the *Harry Potter* book itself). Rather, their first experience is often with the marketing spin-offs, which represent corporate America's interpretation of the real thing. In this respect, children's imaginations are certainly being severely limited and led through corporate mass marketing. However, as if encroachment upon children's imaginations is not bad enough, what is perhaps even more alarming is that these manufactured images feature embedded social normative messages. What are these messages and what are their implications?

**Social Normative Messages**

It is no longer safe to assume that children are able to generate purely their own reflections upon items of child culture such as literature for children. The trespassing of manufactured images into the landscape of the imagination of children is limiting children's capacities to freely imagine; yet, these manufactured images also come with both overt and covert embedded messages. Cultural products aimed at children now seem to inspire as much, if not more, cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching children
specific roles, values, and ideals as that wielded by the more traditional sites of learning, such as the public schools, religious institutions, and the family (Giroux, 1998). The power that the creators of these messages wield is both enormous and significant. This fact warrants careful and critical consideration of the type of messages that those cultural products are sending to children.

In this book, Heilman and Gregory, Kornfeld and Prothro, Goodman and Skulnick, and Heilman (among others) explore how ideology functions within the Harry Potter texts through critical reading and ideological critique. The Gregory and Heilman chapter in this book examines the process of intertextuality in forming world perspectives through the reading of the Harry Potter texts. The authors argue that it is necessary to "consider what types of cultural information is being transmitted." Specifically, they explore social normative messages present in the Harry Potter texts that involve social class, peer group affiliations, race, culture, and nationality. Kornfeld and Prothro use their chapter to discuss the treatment of home and family in the Harry Potter texts. They uncover stereotypical roles of dominant, head-of-the-household father and stay-at-home mothers who are the primary caretakers of house and family, along with messages about the importance of conformity in which "the parents' prime directive seems to be to fit in and make no waves."

The Heilman chapter finds that the Harry Potter books "feature females in secondary positions of power and authority and replicate some of the most demeaning, yet familiar, cultural stereotypes for both males and females."

The Harry Potter books feature images of nuclear families without the inclusion of representations of the divorced, step, single, gay or lesbian, or adoptive or foster families of our contemporary society. The books also reinforce cultural stereotypes of power and gender, consistently portraying women as secondary characters. In addition, there is little cultural diversity represented and, when it is presented, it is in the form of tokenism and colonialism. Racialized groups of wizards, giants, and other creatures are presented in a hierarchical order in which racial difference creates one's social place. Such social normative messages about families, community, race, and gender exemplify who is not a part of the conversation by the exclusion of their representation in the texts. What appears to be represented in the Harry Potter books, then, is an aggregation of quintessential, hegemonic, hierarchical middle-class social and cultural values.

The fact that the social normative messages in the Harry Potter texts are ones of exclusivity is bothersome and warrants critical attention, but there are additional inherent implications here. When voices are excluded from the conversation, or in this case, from the text, there is another subtext message being transmitted. As Giroux (2000) explains, "When adults cling to the idea that a thriving free market economy, with its insidious consumer-based appropriation of freedom and choice, provides the greatest good for the greatest number . . . it is easier for adults to claim that social problems are individual problems" (p. 6). Therefore, those not represented in the texts, those not living the good life, those being oppressed, persecuted, abused, neglected, or simply left behind by mainstream society must be somehow to blame. It is made inconceivable, from this perspective, that society itself might be to blame. Reinforced by these dominant messages it is easier and more comfortable to believe that such societal ills are the result of the problems and deficiencies of individuals themselves. Giroux (2000) writes:

Little is mentioned about the violence perpetuated by those middle-class values and social formations—such as conspicuous consumption, conformity, snobbery, and ostracism—that reproduce racial, class, and gender exclusions. Nor is much said about how middle-class values legitimate and regulate the cultural hierarchies that demean marginalized groups and reinforce racial and economic inequalities. (p. 17)

If these social problems are viewed as incidental (outside of the middle-class world) and a result of individual deficiencies and errors, there is no reason to be alarmed, to try to change it or to resist cultural hegemony found in unexamined places such as Pottermania. Where can one turn in order to begin to find hope that the process of cultural hegemony can be interrupted?

Human Agency and Resistance

Structural Neo-Marxist and Cultural Marxist theories provide useful theoretical tenets with which to view the cultural phenomenon of Pottermania. Using Neo-Marxism as a lens, attention is drawn to political and economic interests in corporate consumerism and the mass media and the resultant social inequalities constructed and reinforced in media and text representations. However, strictly examining the ways in which humans are acted upon by such cultural hegemonic structures leaves out a vital element of the equation, namely, human agency. Expanding these tenets of structural Neo-Marxism to poststructuralist concerns with power and knowledge and adding notions of human agency and resistance magnifies their power. One
of the major representatives for poststructuralist thought is Michel Foucault (sometimes also labeled as a postmodernist, along with Baudrillard) who initially focused upon structures but moved beyond that to focus on power and the linkage between power and knowledge. Power, in the form of cultural hegemony through corporate consumerism's creation and manufacture of Pottermania, is difficult to identify because "a relationship of power is that mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions" (Foucault, 1983, p. 229). Despite Foucault's notion of the insidious way in which power is enacted upon people, critical theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu have continued to attempt to link agency and structure in a meaningful way. Bourdieu (1990), who considers the question of the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism, states that such a strictly structuralist view creates a "absurd opposition between individual and society" (p. 31). This shift in perspective helps to bring back the promise of an individual's ability to reflect upon his or her own situation. Crediting resistance theorists with combining ethnographic and European cultural studies to attempt to demonstrate that social and cultural reproduction can and does meet with elements of opposition, Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) state that "resistance theorists have developed a framework and method of inquiry that restores the critical notion of agency" (p. 67). The focus on power and hegemony create subordinate social classes as seen through a structuralist perspective is tempered through resistance theory to "restore a degree of agency and innovation to the cultures of these groups" (p. 68). These theories of resistance with their emphasis on human agency indicate that there is hope for our ability to talk back to the social normative messages we constantly and consistently receive through corporate consumerism's waging of a war of cultural hegemony. How might this resistance occur? What tools do we have at our disposal? Where do we begin?

Talking Back to Pottermania

A characteristic of late capitalism is that human thinking becomes mechanized as the mind begins to correspond to a machine. In this way, the human mind becomes a segmented and degraded instrument that has lost its capacity for critical thought, "especially its ability to imagine another way of life" (Aronowitz, 1992, p. 80). What, then, are the possibilities for resistance? To create room for resistance, awareness must be raised and critical thought must be allowed to return. In order to achieve this, space must be created in between the imposed phenomena and the people from whom the phenomena allegedly arose. There are obvious fronts on which to fight this battle: literary criticism and media literacy. It is within literary criticism that the true, aesthetic value of children's books can be critically considered and it is within the view of the media as a site for ideological struggle that hope lies for the possibility of resistance to the ravages of Pottermania on child culture.

When considering the huge success of Pottermania, critical questions should come to mind, "What is special about the Harry Potter books?" and "Are they deserving of such a heralded place in our culture?" Jack Zipes (2001) uses a Marxist critical theory perspective to examine children's literature. He warns: "Phenomena such as the Harry Potter books are driven by commodity consumption that at the same time sets the parameters of reading and aesthetic taste" (p. 172). Pennington (2002) likewise warns that "the series is fundamentally failed fantasy" (p. 1). Zipes argues that the Harry Potter series is not a reinvention and reinvigoration of the fantasy genre but rather a less than admirable example of what good fantasy writing can be. He also warns, as do authors of chapters in this book, that the Harry Potter books contain dangerous themes such as sexism. The fact that the Harry Potter books are able to be critically examined and determined to be aesthetically "failed fantasy," containing dangerous social normative messages, supports the argument that perhaps these books are not innocuous, good, clean fun and that the implications of the cultural phenomenon surrounding these books needs to be further scrutinized.

Beyond the inquiry into the aesthetic value of children's literature and the social messages found within books lies the additional promise of the creation of a media literate public, consisting of both adults and children. This aspect of "talking back" to Pottermania is crucial as it represents a chance for resistance against the corporate mass marketing machines that have come to dictate what constitutes popular culture. McLaren et al. (1995) emphasize that developing a critical understanding of the media is crucial for teachers, parents, and children and that it needs to go beyond interpreting the meaning found in media messages. Media literacy, in a broad sense, refers to the ability of individuals both to reflect upon and to analyze their own consumption of media and how they are subtly influenced by media messages. This kind of critical thinking is capable of beginning to create the necessary space between the people and their real artifacts of culture and the artificially manufactured phenomena of Pottermania. The authors of these chapters hope that this book can help readers to do just that.
Notes

1. This is not always a matter of groups deliberately planning to oppress people or alter their consciousness (although this can happen) but rather a matter of how the dominant institutions in society work through values, conceptions of the world, and symbol systems to legitimize the current order (Lye, 1997).

References

The Phenomenon of Harry Potter, or Why All the Talk?

Though there are now four published books in the Harry Potter series, it is difficult to assess them as literature per se. We must talk about a phenomenon, and it is a mind-blowing phenomenon because it reveals just how difficult it is to evaluate and analyze children's literature or adult books that purport to be literature for the young.

Anyone working in the field of children's literature cannot avoid Harry Potter. This past April, I made a passing remark about the Harry Potter books, and I replied that I thought they were formulaic and derivative. The article was long and dealt with many different aspects of the Harry Potter books, and it was published in the "Variety Section" of the Minneapolis Star Tribune about my work with fairy tales that swept into this phenomenon. Jane Smeluck, the journalist who interviewed me into this phenomenon, Mary Jane Smeluck, the journalist who interviewed me, asked me at one point what I thought about the Harry Potter books. I agreed to appear on a public radio talk show and was aggressively attacked by nearly a hundred letters from the mass media. I had received several phone calls from the mass media, and I was not certain whether one can talk about a split between the minority of professional critics who have mixed feelings about the quality of the Harry Potter books and the majority of readers, old and young, who are mesmerized by the young magicians' adventures. But I knew that the phenomenal aspect of the reaction to the Harry Potter books has blurred the focus for anyone who wants to take literature for young people seriously and who may be concerned about standards and taste, that adults can create, for youth culture in the West. It was as if I had suddenly become the only critic to have "negative" things to say about a worldwide phenomenon that millions of readers cherished. But I knew this was not the case because I had talked to numerous colleagues, specialists in children's literature, and authors of children's literature, and young adult books, and they shared a good many of my critical views. I am not certain whether one can talk about a split between the minority of professional critics who have mixed feelings about the quality of the Harry Potter books and the majority of readers, old and young, who are mesmerized by the young magicians' adventures. But I knew this was not the case because I had talked to numerous colleagues, specialists in children's literature, and authors of children's literature, and young adult books, and they shared a good many of my critical views. I am not certain whether one can talk about a split between the minority of professional critics who have mixed feelings about the quality of the Harry Potter books and the majority of readers, old and young, who are mesmerized by the young magicians' adventures. But I knew this was not the case because I had talked to numerous colleagues, specialists in children's literature, and authors of children's literature, and young adult books, and they shared a good many of my critical views.

This interview caused another chain reaction—more requests from the press and radio programs for my opinion about the Harry Potter books. It was as if I had suddenly become the only critic to have "negative" things to say about a worldwide phenomenon that millions of readers cherished. But I knew this was not the case because I had talked to numerous colleagues, specialists in children's literature, and authors of children's literature, and young adult books, and they shared a good many of my critical views. I am not certain whether one can talk about a split between the minority of professional critics who have mixed feelings about the quality of the Harry Potter books and the majority of readers, old and young, who are mesmerized by the young magicians' adventures. But I knew this was not the case because I had talked to numerous colleagues, specialists in children's literature, and authors of children's literature, and young adult books, and they shared a good many of my critical views. I am not certain whether one can talk about a split between the minority of professional critics who have mixed feelings about the quality of the Harry Potter books and the majority of readers, old and young, who are mesmerized by the young magicians' adventures. But I knew this was not the case because I had talked to numerous colleagues, specialists in children's literature, and authors of children's literature, and young adult books, and they shared a good many of my critical views.
industry? Given the changes in the production and reception of children's and youth literature in the last ten years, what criteria can one use to grasp the value of a best-seller, especially when the buyers and readers are to a large degree adults? What constitutes a good fairy-tale novel? How do the Harry Potter books compare to other fantasy works? Is it fair to question the value and quality of J. K. Rowling's books, which have allegedly helped readers of all ages to read again with joy, just because they are so successful?

I believe that it is exactly because the success of the Harry Potter novels is so great and reflects certain troubling sociocultural trends that we must try to evaluate the phenomenon. In fact, I would claim that the only way to do Rowling and her Harry Potter books justice is to try to pierce the phenomenon and to examine her works as critically as possible, not with the intention of degrading them or her efforts, but with the intention of exploring why such a conventional work of fantasy has been fetishized, so that all sorts of magic powers are attributed to the very act of reading those works. The phenomenon is indeed beyond her control. She herself did not even conceive of its possibility. Yet "everyone" appears to be spellbound and drawn to read the Harry Potter books. Might the stories about quaint Harry transform one's own life?

What has actually happened, as I have tried to show throughout this book, is that the conditions under which literature for the young is produced and received have been transformed through institutional changes of education, shifts in family relations, the rise of corporate conglomerates controlling the mass media, and market demands. Phenomena such as the Harry Potter books are driven by commodity consumption that at the same time sets the parameters of reading and aesthetic taste. Today the experience of reading for the young is mediated through the mass media and marketing so that the pleasure and meaning of a book will often be prescribed or dictated by convention. What readers passionately devour and enjoy may be, like many a Disney film or Barbie doll, a phenomenal experience and have personal significance, but it is also an induced experience calculated to conform to a cultural convention of amusement and distraction. It is this highly important connection between the conventional and the phenomenal that I want to explore in my essay on the Harry Potter books in an effort to take children's literature seriously within the political context of current globalizing trends predicated on fostering sameness throughout the world.

There are two common meanings for the word phenomenon. It generally refers to some kind of occurrence, change, or fact that is directly perceived; quite often the event is striking. Or the term is used to describe an extraordinary person, someone with exceptional talent, a phenomenon, whiz kid, or super star. Whether an occurrence or person, there is something incredible about the phenomenon that draws our attention. We hesitate to believe in the event or person we perceive, for a transformation has unexpectedly taken place. One of the reasons we cannot believe our senses is because the phenomenon defies rational explanation. There seems to be no logical cause or clear explanation for the sudden appearance or transformation. Yet it is there, visible and palpable. The ordinary becomes extraordinary, and we are so taken by the phenomenon that we admire, worship, and idolize it without grasping fully why we regard it with so much reverence and awe except to say that so many others regard it as a phenomenon and, therefore, it must be a phenomenon.

Reason no longer applies after a phenomenon has appeared, especially when there is a series of phenomena that contribute to the "Harry Potter phenomenon" such as:

- The rise of the myth of J. K. Rowling, single mother on welfare, sitting in a café and writing the books while raising a daughter by herself. This myth is the old rags-to-riches story and in our day and age has been spread through the mass media. It is the fairy tale about the diligent, hardworking girl who is recognized as a princess and lives happily ever after.

- The rejection of the first novel, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, by several publishers before being accepted by Bloomsbury Publishing in London. Neither the editors at Bloomsbury nor those at Scholastic, Inc. in New York would have predicted that the Harry Potter books would attract so much popular attention and sell in the millions. The long shot finishes a phenomenal first.
• The astonishing appeal of Harry Potter, the hero of all the books, a slight, modest, but confident boy who wears broken glasses. Despite his potentially nerdlike qualities, he has supernatural gifts that enable him to perform heroic deeds and defeat cynical forces of evil much like the knights of Arthurian legend. But Harry is much more successful—a postmodern whiz kid.

• The strange controversy surrounding the Harry Potter books caused by conservatives, even though the works are clearly didactic and moralistic and preach against the evil use of magic. They have drawn the ire of the American religious right, which seeks to ban these books from schools, libraries, and bookstores because Harry is a wizard. Perhaps if Harry were seen as a Christian knight (which he actually is), he might be pardoned for his magical sins. But his stories, considered sinful, have stirred a phenomenal debate in the States.

All these incidental phenomena can be understood as tendencies that form the “dialectics of the phenomenal” operative in the case of the Harry Potter phenomenon. What appears as something phenomenal turns or is turned into its opposite through a process of homogenization: the phenomenal thing or occurrence must become a conventional commodity that can be grasped or consumed to fit our cultural expectations. Otherwise it is not a phenomenon. There are other contributing factors operating here.

J. K. Rowling has overcome hardships and appears to have remarkable endurance and an extraordinary imagination. A divorced mother, she has written four compelling novels and has turned her ordinary life into the extraordinary. Therefore her personal story, or the little we know of it through newspapers, magazine articles; and various Websites, captures our attention and our hearts because of the astonishing turnabout that has occurred in her life, which follows our conventional wish fulfillment of rags to riches.

Her books are phenomenal because, they, too, are ordinary and yet have become extraordinary. There is nothing exceptional about Rowling’s writing in comparison with that of many other gifted writers of children’s and young adult literature. I am thinking here of such fantasy writers as Lloyd Alexander, Natalie Babbitt, Diana Wynne Jones, Francesca Lia Block, Philip Pullman, Jane Yolen, Donna Jo Napoli and many others who are constantly experimenting in innovative ways—and not always successfully. What distinguishes the plots of Rowling’s novels, however, are their conventionality, predictability, and happy ends despite the clever turns of phrases and surprising twists in the intricate plots. They are easy and delightful to read, carefully manicured and packaged, and they sell extraordinarily well precisely because they are so cute and ordinary.

Harry Potter as a fictitious character is ordinary on first appearance because he more closely resembles a bookworm than a hero. Yet, like Clark Kent, he has more to him than his appearance would indicate. He is one of the mythical chosen heroes, called upon by powers greater than himself to rescue his friends and the world from diabolical evil. He is David, Tom Thumb, Jack the Giant Killer, Aladdin, and Horatio Alger all in one, the little guy who proves he’s bigger than life. But because he does not fight in the name of Judeo-Christianity, he is suspect and causes controversy.

There is something wonderfully paradoxical about the phenomena surrounding the phenomenon of the Harry Potter books. For anything to become a phenomenon in Western society, it must become conventional; it must be recognized and categorized as unusual, extraordinary, remarkable, and outstanding. In other words, it must be popularly accepted, praised, or condemned, worthy of everyone’s attention; it must conform to the standards of exception set by the mass media and promoted by the culture industry in general. To be phenomenal means that a person or commodity must conform to the tastes of hegemonic groups that determine what makes up a phenomenon. It is impossible to be phenomenal without conforming to conventionality. Whether you are a super athlete, actor, writer or commodity—and there is tremendous overlap in these categories—you must be displayed and display yourself according to socially accepted rules and expectations of “phenomenality.” In American and British culture, the quality of what rises to the top is always appropriated, and if the phenomenon does somehow contain some qualities that are truly different, they are bound to be corrupted and degraded, turning the phenomenon against itself and into a homogenized commodity that will reap huge profits until the next phenomenon appears on the horizon. Difference and otherness are obliterated in the process. What appears unique conceals the planned production of commonality and
undermines the autonomy of judgment. A phenomenon can sway us from ourselves. We become dizzy and delirious.

In the case of the Harry Potter books, their phenomenality detracts from their conventionality, and yet their absolute conformance to popular audience expectations is what makes for their phenomenality. So far there are four novels: Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (1998), Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (1999), Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (1999), and Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2000). Each one is well over 300 pages. Indeed, the last novel, a tour-de-force, that demands patience and perseverance on the part of valiant readers, amounts to 734 pages. These works have been followed by Harry Potter commodities, with a film in the planning stages. Rowling has intended from the beginning to write seven novels altogether, a magic number, but if you've read one, you've read them all: the plots are the same, and in my opinion, the story lines become tedious and grating after you have read the first. Here is the formula for each novel:

**Part I. Prison** Harry the imaginative hero, the chosen one, lives in the home of Vernon and Petunia Dursley because he is an orphan. They have a fat slob of a son named Dudley, who becomes more disgusting and unlike with each novel. All three are referred to as Muggles because they are not wizards. In other words, they lack imagination and are materialist philistines. Their home is more like a prison than anything else, or to be more precise, it is the domain of banal reality. The Dursleys and their kind are devoid of imagination. Indeed, they are afraid of magic and the world of fantasy.

**Part II. The Noble Calling** Since Harry is special a member of the elect, he receives a summons, calling, invitation, command, or reminder to attend Hogwarts, the school for wizards, at the end of each summer after he has reached the age of ten. To accomplish this task, Harry must break out of the Dursleys' home.

**Part III. The Heroic Adventures** Harry travels in some magical fashion to Hogwarts, where he will be tested in various ways, but he is always pitted against his archenemy Voldemort, a sinister wizard, who killed Harry's parents and tried to kill the boy as well. Thanks to his mother's sacrifice, Harry survived Voldemort's first attempt to murder him, but the evil wizard is on a mad quest to finish the job. Hogwarts and the environment (including a Forbidden Forest and a town called Hogsmede) constitute the mystical realm in which Harry with his noble sidekick, Ron Weasley, fight against the sadistic Draco Malfoy and his cruel pals Crabbe and Goyle. Their fights, which often take place on the playing field of quidditch (a bizarre spatial game that resembles computerized baseball, basketball, and hockey played on broomsticks) are only the backdrop for deadly battles with the forces of Voldemort. Cheering Harry on are two girls, Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley, Ron's younger sister. Whatever happens—and the plots always involve a great deal of manly competition and some kind of mystery—you can be sure that Harry wins.

**Part IV. The Reluctant Return Home** Exhausted, drained, but enlightened Harry is always victorious by the time summer recess is about to begin. Unfortunately, Harry must always return to the banal surroundings of the Dursley home.

The plots of the first four novels thus far resemble the structure of a conventional fairy tale: a modest little protagonist, typically male, who does not at first realize how talented he is and who departs from his home on a mission or is banished until he fulfills three tasks. He generally enters a mysterious forest or unknown realm on his quest. Along his way he meets animals or friends who, in return, give him gifts that will help him. Sometimes he meets an old sage or wise woman, who will provide him with support and aid. At one point he encounters a tyrant, ogre, or competitor, whom he must overcome to succeed in his mission. Invariably, he defeats his opponent and either returns home or settles in a new domain with money, wife, and happy prospects.

Rowling's novels are, of course, much more complicated and complex than your classical fairy tale. They have clearly been influenced by mystery novels, adventure films, TV sitcoms, and fiction series, and they bear all the typical trademarks that these popular genres exhibit. Indeed, the last novel, The Goblet of Fire, even had scenes modeled on the European soccer championship matches replete with cheerleaders and hooligans. Perhaps it is because the novels are a hodgepodge of these popular entertainments that her novels are so appealing.

In keeping with the tendency in Western popular culture, one story is never enough, especially if it sells well and sits well with audiences.
Repeat it, tweak it, and milk it until the ratings diminish. The problem for the author of a series is how to inform new readers or remind readers of what has happened in the previous books, and after the first novel Rowling has had to resort to hackneyed tricks of the trade to fill in gaps. In the second novel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, she had to spend the entire first chapter more or less summarizing the first novel, just as she had to do in the third novel, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*:

The Dursley family of number four, Privet Drive, was the reason that Harry never enjoyed his summer holidays. Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and their son, Dudley, were Harry's only living relatives. They were Muggles, and they had a very medieval attitude toward magic. Harry's dead parents, who had been a witch and wizard themselves, were never mentioned under the Dursleys' roof. For years, Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon had hoped that if they kept Harry as downtrodden as possible, they would be able to squash the magic out of him. To their fury, they had been unsuccessful. These days they lived in terror of anyone finding out that Harry had spent most of the last two years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The most they could do, however, was to lock away Harry's spellbooks, wand, cauldron, and broomstick at the start of the summer break and forbid him to talk to the neighbors.5

And in the fourth novel, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, we learn:

Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and Dudley were Harry's only living relatives. They were Muggles who hated and despised magic in any form, which meant that Harry was as welcome in their house as dry rot.6

Though Rowling misinterprets history when she criticizes the Dursleys' attitude toward magic as "medieval," a period that evidenced a strong belief in magic and an acceptance of miraculous happenings, we get the picture: the Dursleys are coarse, pragmatic materialists, frightened by people as different as Harry.

But is Harry really different? He is white, Anglo-Saxon, bright, athletic, and honest. The only mark of difference he bears is a slight lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. Otherwise, he is the classic Boy Scout, a little mischievous like Tom Sawyer or one of the Hardy boys. He does not curse; he speaks standard English grammatically, as do all his friends; he is respectful to his elders; and he has perfect manners. He would definitely help a grandmother cross the street, perhaps even fly her across on his broomstick. He is a straight arrow, for he has a noble soul and will defend the righteous against the powers of evil. This means that Harry the scout must play the role of a modern-day TV sleuth in each novel. In the first novel, he is given the task of discovering what the sorcerer's stone is, who invented it, and how to prevent Voldemort from obtaining it. In the second novel, he must discover who is turning his friends into stone, in particular Ginny, whose soul and body are controlled by a sinister force. In the third novel, he helps capture the notorious escaped prisoner of Azkaban, Sirius Black, only to learn that Sirius did not aid Voldemort in killing his parents, nor does he want to kill Harry. Surprisingly he turns out to be Harry's godfather, who will look after him in the future. In the fourth novel, he completes three difficult tasks in the Triwizard Tournament and then thwarts Voldemort's attempt to kill him once again. His great discovery here is that Voldemort has regained human form and is assembling Death Eaters and Dementors ostensibly to take over the world through black magic. The plots in each one of these novels take numerous arbitrary and inventive twists and turns, and in the third and fourth books, the mysteries become so involved and intricate that it is almost impossible to follow the clues. Nevertheless, Harry can and does. He is the ultimate detective, and Ron, as in all buddy/cop films, is always at his side. Typically, the girls are always left to gawk and gaze at Harry's stunning prowess. The cultural critic Christine Schoeler perceptively remarks:

Harry's fictional realm of magic and wizardry perfectly mirrors the conventional assumption that men do and should run the world. From the beginning of the first Potter book, it is boys and men, wizards and sorcerers, who catch our attention by dominating the scenes and determining the action. Harry, of course, plays the lead. In his epic struggle with the forces of darkness—the evil wizard Voldemort and his male supporters—Harry is supported by the dignified wizard Dumbledore and a colorful cast of male characters. Girls, when they are not downright silly or unlikable, are helpers, enablers and instruments. No girl is brilliantly heroic the way Harry is, no woman experienced and wise like Professor Dumbledore. In fact, the range of female personalities is so limited that neither women nor girls play on the side of evil.7
But what are we to expect when women are generally accessories in most TV police shows, detective novels, and mysteries? In the Harry Potter books they fulfill stereotypical roles, but so do most of the characters. As Schoefe has demonstrated, Professor Dumbledore is Harry's spiritual father, the ultimate saintly wizard, who operates behind the scenes to guide and help Harry. Then we have the bumbling but good-hearted giant Hagrid, who provides comic relief; the strict assistant principal Minerva McGonagall; the rich snob Draco Malfoy, Harry's nemesis at the school; Professor Snape, the snide teacher who holds a grudge against Harry, but will undoubtedly unveil a positive side; Argus Filch, the nosy caretaker; Ron Weasley, the dependable, faithful friend; Ginny Weasley, who has a love interest in Harry; Sirius the protective godfather; and last but not least, Hermione Granger, the bookish and bright girl, who always comes up with the right answers and can be a pain in the neck because of the strange causes that she supports. There are others, but these onedimensional characters are planted in each one of the novels to circle around Harry with his phallic wand and to function in a way that will highlight his extraordinary role as Boy Scout/detective. There is indeed nothing wrong in being a Boy Scout, and I suspect that this is why many adults, especially parents, like Harry; he is a perfect model for boys because he excels in almost everything he undertakes. But this is also his difficulty as a literary character: he is too flawless and almost a caricature of various protagonists from pop culture. Like young heroes today, Harry appeals to young readers (and adults) because Rowling has endowed him with supernatural powers of the sort we can see in The Power Rangers, X-Men, Star Wars, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and numerous other TV shows and films. Harry "acts out" his role with wand, invisible cape, and broomstick to determine his destiny, and though adults may help him, he is literally the one who has the power to use for the benefit of goodness.

From the Manichean concept of the world in the novels it might seem clear what good and evil are, but these concepts prove amorphous. There appear to be two major types of evil in the books: the vicious sadism of Voldemort and the cruel vindictiveness of the Dursleys. They have evil written over their faces, even though the nature of their evil is different. Therefore it is easy to empathize with Harry. Voldemort is a killer who stalks Harry, and Rowling is expert at creat-

ing an atmosphere of frenzy and fear in which Harry must hunt the evil one as he is being stalked. Almost everyone except Harry refers to Voldemort as "You-Know-Who," rather than naming him, for it is believed that naming him will mean calling him. Rowling likes to play with names using foreign associations and phonetics to induce associations. Voldemort evokes some German and Scandinavian names. Volde means woods or open field and is pronounced vold. Then there is the old Norse volr which means field mouse or rat. We use the word vol today to describe a common rodent. Mort is clearly French for death. So we have evil as a death field mouse or a death rat. But the meaning is irrelevant. It is the association of Voldemort with uncontrollable evil that is important. He keeps shifting shapes and is hard to define, so that Harry is called upon to protect himself and others at every turn he takes and, it would seem, every second he is at Hogwarts. (It is interesting that Voldemort pursues Harry mainly when he is at the place where he should feel most protected.)

Is this why young readers (and perhaps adults as well) are drawn to Harry and his numerous encounters with and fights against evil? Are we living in such a paranoid world, in which children and adults feel violence might occur at any moment, that we must live our lives constantly on guard? Are pedophiles, kidnappers, serial killers, and mass murderers all around us? Do the mass media create an atmosphere of hysteria so that white England and white America paint dark forces surrounding them, seeking to invade their homes and steal their children? Just as it is difficult to place our finger on evil in the real world, evil is elusive in the Harry Potter novels, and yet it lurks around every corner and on almost every page.

Even in Muggleland, or suburban England, evil exists in the shape of the Dursley family. Vernon and Petunia abuse Harry by depriving him of food, locking him in a closet, and preventing him from having contact with friends, while their son picks on Harry at every chance he gets. All three are sadists, and Harry is psychologically starved for love and affection—although he always appears chipper and perseveres. Rowling is heavy-handed in her depiction of the Dursley family that bears some resemblance to cartoon characters of the TV Simpson family. They are so plainly uncouth and comical that they pose no great threat to Harry, who always finds a way (through cleverness or
Bernstein points out that Harry represents the vulnerability and powerlessness that children feel, and the Potter books, like fairy tales, may indeed enable children as readers to deal therapeutically with issues of abandonment, loneliness, and alienation. Yet we have no proof whatsoever that fairytale operates this way. One could make the opposite case and argue that many of the classical fairy tales have helped disseminate stereotypical notions of gender and race and have indoctrinated children through stereotypes—not through archetypes—to believing in set patterns of behavior in accord with patriarchal codes. Even “Hansel and Gretel” can be read as a rationalization of the abusive treatment of defenseless children who forgive their father (not their mother) for his abandonment of them. Ever since Jacqueline Rose's important book The Case of Peter Pan, critics in the field of children’s literature have studied the fictional child and how writers manipulate readers through personal projections of children to deal with and perhaps rationalize their own desires and needs.

Rowling, too, has her own psychological need to project children and a realm of childhood in which she consciously and subconsciously manipulates her figures to please herself. As she has stated, “I just write what I wanted to write. I write what amuses me. It’s totally for myself. I never in my wildest dreams expected this popularity.” But she also wants to generate an emotional effect in readers commensurate with the pleasure that she hopes to attain. The mechanisms that she uses are part and parcel of popular culture and the conventional repertoire of the fairy tale. Harry Potter is her fictional child: she is all-powerful and controls arbitrarily all the characters and events in the Harry Potter books. They are nothing without her—without her ideological perspective, desires, cravings, and craft.

Whether the books will have the effect on readers that she desires is another question. Bernstein, for instance, reads the books, dismisses them, and then reevaluates them from Bettelheim’s questionable perspective—certainly not from his nephew’s personal perspectives, because he did not explore the effects that the books had on them. My guess is that even if he had done this, he would have gotten different results: children do not all read the same way, nor do all children read best-sellers, especially when they are over 700 pages long.

This past February I did a storytelling session at the Marcy School in Minneapolis with fifth- and sixth-graders. At the end of the session I discussed the Harry Potter books with them and why they liked or disliked the books. There were about twenty-two youngsters in an integrated group, half girls, half boys. The teacher had bought all three hardcover novels, which were prominently placed in the classroom. (The fourth book had not yet appeared.) She bought them because she felt that they would stimulate the boys to read more. However, when I asked how many of them had actually read the first novel, only half the students raised their hands, and they were mostly girls. The students knew the novel mainly because the teacher was reading it to them. She had not gotten beyond the first novel. Only one of the girls and one of the boys had read all three; a few others had read two. Some of the students called the books boring. For the most part, they liked what was being read to them, but they liked other books equally well. When I criticized the books for being sexist, several girls rose to the defense of Rowling and argued that Hermione was a key figure in the books, and without her Harry would not be able to solve the mysteries. Yet after I explained my viewpoint, some agreed that Hermione was more an accessory than the major active protagonist. Many hesitated to discuss the novels because they had not read them all. One of the girls revealed that when she had been asked by her parents whether she had wanted to use her allowance money to buy a Harry Potter novel or to wait until Christmas, when she would receive it as a gift, she chose to wait until Christmas. Indeed, while children are not adverse to reading the Harry Potter adventures and other books, they are adverse to spending money on
them. They certainly do not buy them. Adults have clearly been buying the majority of the Harry Potter books.

In the June 9, 2000, issue of USA Today, there is a graph showing that 43 percent of the Harry Potter books were bought for people over age fourteen, while 57 percent were bought for people under age fourteen.10 However, this graph and the article entitled “Harry Potter’s Simplicity Lures Kids of All Ages” contain little meaning because they do not reveal whether the books were actually read, who did all the buying, and what social classes, ethnic groups, and genders are reading the books. Indeed, there are no reliable and thorough demographic studies concerning the purchase of the Harry Potter books and their reception among adults and children. Nevertheless, we can make educated assumptions about the dissemination and reading of the books. For example, in the United States, the first four novels have appeared mainly in hardback editions costing around twenty dollars. Only recently has a softback edition of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone appeared. Given the purchasing tendencies of Americans, we can assume that adults are buying the books for children and themselves, and that most of the purchasers are well to do. Since the books are very long, the attention span of most youngsters is short, and since children watch on the average of three hours of television a day, we may also assume that a very small minority of children (and adults) is actually reading the books and reflecting on them. It may be that this minority is large and vocal and not to be discounted for courageously reading all four books. But I want to emphasize that this reading public is probably limited to affluent white children and their parents, and that all these readers react in highly diverse ways to the Harry Potter books. I cannot speculate about the positive psychological effects that these novels are having on children and adults. On the other hand, Rowling’s books conventionally repeat much of the same sexist and white patriarchal biases of classical fairy tales.

In a recent article in The Horn Book, Brian Alderson, one of the most astute contemporary critics of children’s literature in England, recalls a disturbingly common experience he had at the seventy-fifth birthday party of Joan Aiken, one of the most inventive writers of fairy tales and fantasy novels in the world today. Attending the party was a young lady, a children’s books editor for one of England’s national newspapers, whom he describes as “one of those bright eager souls who seem to be ubiquitous here on the lower slopes of journalism and in publishers’ publicity departments.”11 At one point she asked him who his favorite writer for children was, and he responded with great hesitation, wary about the question and the questioner:

“Well—I’m an unrepentant admirer of William Mayne.” “Ooh,” says she, “who’s he? What age does he write for?”

Will it surprise you if I confess that I was not altogether unsurprised by that ingenuous remark? I’ve met its equivalent quite a lot just lately and I’m sage enough to realize that greybeards like me can’t expect instant apprehension of knowledge that we’ve taken decades to acquire.12

He continues in his brief article to discuss the problems that arise when young people who know very little about the history of children’s literature assume positions of arbiters of taste and judgment and pontificate about children’s books, and at the same time he ponders whether “old professionals” like himself, who know too much about the quality of “past splendors,” may have difficulty in appreciating contemporary children’s books that are given undue praise without comparison to numerous other outstanding works in the field. For Alderson, the situation is indeed absurd as he contemplates how the overwhelming phenomenon of Harry Potter detracts from the profound accomplishments of Joan Aiken and other writers such as Mayne, Rosemary Sutcliff, Ursula LeGuin, and Jammie Howker.

Roger Sutton, the editor of The Horn Book, writes that he received a letter accompanying a reader’s copy of Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban from Scholastic, Rowling’s publisher in New York, in which Scholastic said of the Harry Potter books: “all of this attention focused on a children’s book can only be good for the visibility of children’s literature in general—everyone wins.”13 Of course, Scholastic wins most of all and is rolling in money, but it is not fair to blame the publisher for the success of the Harry Potter books. Still, the statement is self-serving and deceptive. Children’s literature was big business and a huge success long before the Harry Potter books appeared on the scene. The field of children’s literature did not need nor does it now need these books to become more visible. Do these books prove the quality of children’s literature? Certainly not. Books of quality—including those for young adults—are unfortunately not
being read as widely as the "phenomenal" books. Is everyone winning? Does Scholastic mean that more children are being motivated to read? Is this true? And if it is, should we rejoice? This reminds me of the old argument that it does not matter what children read as long as they read. (We want them functionally literate. That is all that matters.) Well then, the Harry Potter books, I say, as an unabashed adult reader, will certainly help children become functionally literate, for they are part of the eternal return to the same and, at the same time, part of the success and process by which we homogenize our children. Making children all alike is, sadly, a phenomenon of our times.

NOTES

1. In her article, "At Last, The Wizard Gets Back to School," Janet Maslin comments: "The frenzy that has greeted the fourth book in the series, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, would seem to go beyond any reasonable response to fiction, no matter how genuinely delightful that fiction happens to be. Instead, the current wave of Harrymania brings the Potter series to a fever pitch better associated with movie hype, major sports events and hot new Christmas toys," the New York Times (July 10, 2000): B1.

2. In a short editorial, Roger Sutton, editor of The Horn Book, alludes to the phenomenon and the difficulty it causes in evaluating children's literature: "I don't have any opinions about Harry; at least I didn't have any opinions until J. K. Rowling's series became a 'publishing phenomenon' (ghastly but apt phrase) and . . . children's books became All About Harry. So I'm not feeling suckered—neither by the book nor by the publisher, but by the cosmic forces that have ordained that this likable but critically insignificant series become widely popular and therefore news, and therefore something I'm supposed to have an opinion about." "Potter's Field," The Horn Book 75 (September/October 1999): 1.


4. This controversy is actually very old. Religious groups—beginning with the Catholic Church in the fifteenth century and individual tyrannical kings and governments up through the Nazi and communist regimes have tried to ban, censor and burn books. One of the first major assaults in America was on L. Frank Baum's The Wizard of Oz, and there will be many more to come. It is not unusual for narrow-minded religious groups and authoritarian governments to want to destroy something or people in the name of morality. For a sober discussion of the religious viewpoint, see Kimbra Wilder Gish, "Hunting Down Harry Potter: An Exploration of Religious Concerns about Children's Literature," The Horn Book 76 (May/June 2000): 262-71. While pleading for tolerance on both the right and the left, Gish does not deal with the contradictions in the Bible, which is filled with a great deal of magic and folklore.


12. Ibid., 349.