

Legacy of Magic, Disenchantment, and Fantasy in J K Rowling's Harry Potter Series

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The Potter books have made children's literature more visible, the market more receptive to hardcover editions of new children's fiction, and reviewers more willing to tackle juvenile titles in their columns.

- Weinberg

What makes J K Rowling's Harry Potter Series a landmark in the domain of Young Adult fiction is the fact that it vouchsafes not only for the relevance and designation of fantasy in literature but also for the reinforcement of life through the spectacular medium of fantasy. Harry Potter is "not just a book, it has become an icon, a Michael Jordan, a Coca-Cola, a Pop-Tart in modern pop culture." ¹Brenda Bowen, executive vice president and publisher of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing and twenty-one-year publishing veteran rightly remarked, "There is not a particle of me that's troubled by the idea that adults might be reading children's books. They jolly well should be. Thank you, J. K. Rowling, for making it cool to read children's books."²

Although "Harry Potter" is a product of pure imagination and creates a world of fantasy, magic, witchcraft, and wizards, the fabric of reality is interwoven into the fantastical world of fiction very beautifully. Interestingly, we perceive in the Harry Potter series, a subtle presence of implied social criticism, where, examining the issues in the supernatural world, Rowling is also commenting on the values of human life. However, in doing so, Rowling in no way mars the enjoyment of the story. As Elizabeth D. Schafer remarks "Rowling originally created the story to entertain herself and did not intentionally pen a children's book. She considered her imaginary world as a personal escape from despair, and she praises the book for providing a challenging project that boosted her morale".³

Centered around the struggle of good versus evil—the exploits of Harry Potter and his colleagues not only serve as a source of entertainment but provide an impetus for children's social and moral development as well. Harry Potter novels belong to the epic tradition in children's literature where a hero or group of heroes fight deadly battles and eventually defeat the powerful embodiment of Evil. The story is woven around symbolic swords and great teachers, disloyal and faithful friends, and tests of moral strength. Usually, a single, omniscient, and practically omnipotent individual

exercises great moral and magical influence and guides the protagonists through their adventures. The fall of Evil ends by offering an option between a life of continued magic and unlimited happiness or else a return to the humdrum world of humanity.

Like his literary predecessors, Harry begins as a "normal" boy in an unhappy home. As mentioned above, on the eve of his eleventh birthday, he is pleasantly surprised to find that he is, in fact, a wizard. Endowed with strange and till now unforeseen powers, he has already unknowingly defeated one of the most evil and potent wizards in history, and it is now time for him to acquire his rightful place in the magical realm. Supported and advised by Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts School and reputedly the only other wizard capable of dealing with Voldemort, Harry starts a series of truly challenging and frightening encounters with his horrifying arch-rival. Dumbledore gives wise counsel and presumed protection but allows Harry to engage demons on his terms, and always fails to turn up until the very end of each dramatic climax. With the aid of his own devices, the boy and his brave, loyal group of friends repeatedly thwart and spoil the schemes of the master villain and his masked henchmen.

The storylines are interspersed with primary social and personal concerns, as in all other classic children's fantasies. Jealousy, anger, petty misunderstandings, budding romances, selfishness, and the other usual issues repeatedly exhibit themselves. In the latest book, Rowling does a particularly good job of portraying the various insecurities and fears suffered by young people on the eve of their first dance, as well as the destructive power of young male egos and the continued allure of the school jock. As expected, while Harry and his friends bravely contest their adolescent forebodings, they discover significant lessons about themselves and the world around them.

Harry himself epitomizes magic in a Muggle World. Usually, magic happens to the child protagonists in these stories as they are flung into different worlds, or they just happen to falter upon a magical ring, book, carpet, or creature. Harry, on the other hand, is the master of his universe. Yet a dilettante, Harry is exceedingly accomplished in the art and science of magic and is closer to Hogwarts than he is to the Muggle world. The Dursleys - the Muggle house in which he grew up and was tortured throughout his young life - is not Harry's home, nor are the train stations and taxi stands and other "normal" places and circumstances in which he finds himself. He is most glad and most relaxed when he is strongly concealed in the "secondary" world of magic.

The Harry Potter novels do not seem to recommend morality or provide obvious religious ideas, but they do provide a constant, yet adaptable, ethical code that adds a note of oral solemnness while remaining entertaining at the same time. Although Harry Potter is perpetually under ultimatum from Lord Voldemort, he conquers over evil despite his remote possibilities of victory mainly because of the instructions furnished by Dumbledore and other teachers in the semblance of instructions on giving attention and proficiently differentiating between good and evil at any level. "Behind the witchcraft and the wizardry lies an intensely moral fable about good and evil, love and hatred, life and death," utters James Runcie at the very start of his documentary film: *J.K. Rowling: A Year in the Life*.⁴ This series is concerned with values like

heroism, love, friendship, or death. Death features predominantly throughout the whole story. Even though it is mainly children's literature, death is one of the major topics as it is omnipresent. It begins with the death of Harry's parents, continues with the search of the Philosopher's Stone that provides immortality, in the first volume, and deals with the search for forever life by Lord Voldemort who tries to conquer death. Neither Muggles nor wizards know what lies beyond death, which means that they are frightened of it and try to find a way to trick it.

In the first book in the series: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, we first meet the orphaned Harry living in a cupboard under the stairs at the home of his Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and doltish cousin Dudley Dursley. His parents who were wizards were killed by an evil force and it is a miracle that Harry survived. He is left at the house by three people from the wizard world. They think this is the safest place for him, and that it is good for him to be with relatives. "It's the best place for him, said Dumbledore firmly. His aunt and uncle will be able to explain everything to him when he's older. I've written them a letter."⁵

After that scenario, we get to meet Harry who is now ten years old. He is not treated well at all; on the contrary, he is always made to feel how unwanted he is at Dursley's home. Harry has a cousin the same age, Dudley, who intimidates him every opportunity he gets. Harry is made to believe that his parents died in a car accident, and he has a scar on his forehead that probably happened in that accident. His room is in the cupboard under the stairs. One day he sees a letter addressed to: 'Mr. Harry Potter THE CUPBOARD UNDER THE STAIRS...The sender is Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft.' Harry's aunt and uncle desperately try to keep Harry from reading it. They do not want to be part of anything magic, and they also want to keep Harry from knowing who and what he is. Uncle Vernon yells at his wife: "I'm not having one in the house, Petunia! Didn't we swear when we took him in, we'd stamp out that dangerous nonsense?"⁶

However, more and more letters keep flooding, dozens by the day. Ultimately, Uncle Vernon nearly turns mad and decides to move away for some time. Somehow, moving does not help and on Harry's eleventh birthday, he is discovered by Hagrid, a giant game and key keeper at Hogwarts. Harry comes to know what he is- a wizard. "Never wondered how you got that mark on her forehead? That was no ordinary cut. That's what you get when a powerful evil force touches yeh - took care of yer mum an' dad an' yer house, even - but it didn't work on you, an' that's why yer famous, Harry. No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one except you, an' he killed some o' the best witches an' wizards of the age (...) an' you was only a baby, and you lived."⁷ Thus, on his eleventh birthday, Harry, who was until now unaware of his wizarding talents, comes to know that he has been admitted to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He begins his journey from King's Cross Station Platform 9, to learn about potions, spells, and Defense Against the Dark Arts. Seeking Hagrid's assistance, Harry prepares for and begins his first year of study at Hogwarts. As Harry begins to survey the magical world, the reader is acquainted with several important spots employed in the series. Harry encounters most of the main protagonists and wins his

two closest friends: Ron Weasley, a cheerful and friendly member of an old, large, happy, but impoverished wizarding family, and Hermione Granger, a talented and energetic witch of a non-magical family. Harry also meets the school's potions master, Severus Snape, who shows an intense hatred for him. Harry comes to know that the evil Lord Voldemort killed his parents and that the lightning-bolt scar on his forehead was caused by the dark wizard trying to kill him as well. Harry and new friends Ron and Hermione plunge into their first big risk: to prevent Voldemort's discovery of the Sorcerer's Stone and its chances of everlastingness. The plot ends with Harry's second encounter with Lord Voldemort, who in his pursuit of immortality, desires to acquire the power of the Philosopher's Stone.

Her next book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* is also immensely popular. Harry's second year at Hogwarts starts precariously when he is nearly thrown out for hijacking a magical car to fly him to Hogwarts. Harry, who is excited about his next year at Hogwarts, gets a warning from a little green elf, Dobby, threatening him that evil things might take place if he returns to Hogwarts. Disregarding the warning, Harry comes to discover that the evil chamber of secrets has been opened, and something or someone is converting students into stone. Harry, with the aid of his two intimate friends, Hermione and Ron, unravels the mystery and kills the serpent that stays in the chamber. Harry along with his friends probes into a fifty year old mystery that seems connected to recent evil occurrences at the school. Ron's younger sister, Ginny Weasley, enlists in her first year at Hogwarts and discovers a notebook that happens to be Voldemort's school-time diary. Ginny becomes enchanted by Voldemort through the diary and opens the "Chamber of Secrets", unbridling an ancient monster within, which starts attacking students at Hogwarts.

Also, for the first time, Harry realizes that ethnic bias is prevalent in the wizarding world, and he gets to know that Voldemort's regime of horror and fright was often directed at wizards who descended from Muggles. Harry is also appalled to know that he can speak Parseltongue, the language of snakes; this unique proficiency is often likened to the dark arts. The novel ends after Harry protects the life of Ginny Weasley, by ravaging a Basilisk and the diary, in which Voldemort saved a piece of his soul. However, Harry does not realize this until quite late in the series. The idea of keeping a part of one's soul inside something to prevent death is formally presented in the sixth novel under the term "Horcrux". Thus, Harry and his friends have their first encounter with racial prejudice when they learn of the great wizard Salazar Slytherin's desire that only pure-blood wizards, not half-bloods (children of a Muggle parent and a wizard parent) and Mud blood (those born to Muggle parents) be permitted to pursue studies at Hogwarts.

The third novel, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, describes Harry in his third year of magical studies. It is the only book in the series in which Voldemort is not present. On the contrary, Harry must have in his knowledge that he is being targeted by Sirius Black, the notorious prisoner and apparent heir to Lord Voldemort, who has run away from Azkaban and is assumed to be going to Hogwarts to kill Harry thinking that with Harry's demise Voldemort would come back. Harry, however, is not scared

of Sirius but the prison guards who are creeping near school boundaries looking for their absconder. In the end, Harry, Ron, and Hermione discover Sirius and come to know the reality about what occurred so many years ago on the night Voldemort killed Harry's parents.

As Harry struggles with his reaction to the dark specters—dark creatures with the power to annihilate a human soul—which are guarding the school, he goes to Remus Lupin, a Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher with a dark secret. Lupin instructs Harry about shielding actions which are much above the standard of magic usually displayed by people his age. Harry gets to know that both Lupin and Black were bosom friends of his father and that Black was deceived by their fourth friend, Peter Pettigrew. In every book, there is a new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, none of whom stays for more than a year. The vibes at Hogwarts are tyrannical as the Dementors, the Azkaban prison guards, close the school in while awaiting Sirius. Harry must face Sirius and handle the new information about his parents' past. Harry is also occupied with the domineering Draco Malfoy and his Quidditch team's tiff for the House Cup. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the important fourth book is too lengthy. In this book, Rowling picks up Harry's life very shortly after the end of *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. During the summer vacation in Hogwarts School, Harry has returned to the house of the brutal and abhorred Dursleys, his relatives. Harry, now 14, is saved from the Dursleys by his school friend, Ron Weasley, whose family takes the boys to the World Cup Quidditch finals. During Harry's fourth year of school, Harry hesitatingly entered as a participant in the Triwizard Tournament, a precarious tussle with witches and wizards of visiting schools.

Harry wants to know who got him into the tournament and for what reason. Harry is instructed in the tournament by Professor Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody, who happens to be a fraud — one of Voldemort's helpers in disguise. The entire plan was to bring Voldemort back to power. The novel culminates with the demise of Cedric Diggory, one of Harry's competitors in the match, and Voldemort's rebirth. The thirteen-year-old Harry attends his first Quidditch World Cup, gets attracted to a fellow student, and plays in the Triwizard tournament which is an international tournament where participants from many schools face each other in many challenging programs. After being victorious at the last event, Harry again gets involved in a dangerous fight with the dark lord. This time, however, Voldemort has recovered his power and trained many of his old supporters. Harry's valour defies Voldemort's evil powers, as he manages to escape unharmed. Like earlier books, Rowling adds new elements and characters to keep his readers hooked.

In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry must contest the new restrengthened Voldemort. Voldemort's reappearance makes Dumbledore reactivate the Order of the Phoenix, a secret society that works from Sirius Black's dark family home to defeat Voldemort's slaves and safeguard Voldemort's targets, especially Harry. The Order consists of many of the adults Harry trusts, including Remus Lupin, Sirius Black, and members of the Weasley family, but also some unexpected members; the loyalties of some characters are not clear, such as Mundungus

Fletcher. Despite Harry's description of Voldemort's recent activities, the Ministry of Magic and many others in the magical world refuse to believe that Voldemort has returned. To counter and eventually discredit Dumbledore, who along with Harry is the most prominent voice in the Wizarding World attempting to warn against the Dark Lord's return, the Ministry appoints Dolores Umbridge as the High Inquisitor of Hogwarts.

She changes the school into a tyrannical place and disallows the students to defend themselves against dark magic. Harry forms "Dumbledore's Army", a secret study group to drive home to his classmates the higher-level skills of Defence Against the Dark Arts that he has learned. The novel introduces Harry to Luna Lovegood, an airy young witch who believes in oddball conspiracy theories. A very significant prophecy is unveiled, and Harry finds a painful connection, allowing Harry to view some of Voldemort's actions telepathically.

In the novel's climax, Harry and his school friends contest against Voldemort's Death Eaters, comprising of the rich and arrogant Malfoy family. However, members of the Order of the Phoenix save the lives of the children and get the Death Eaters captured and imprisoned. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Rowling continues to build the overall plot positing good versus evil.

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the protagonists, who are in their sixth year, have passed their OWLs and start on their specialist NEWT courses. Voldemort is involved in a new very violent wizarding war. Although Harry and their friends are comparatively saved from that peril at Hogwarts, they must face all the traumas of adolescence. As the novel starts, Harry finds an old potions textbook containing explanations and suggestions signed by a mysterious writer, the Half-Blood Prince. The points mentioned in the book help Harry to excel at potions. Under the tutorial guidance of Albus Dumbledore, Harry finds various memories concerning the early life of Voldemort. Harry's arrogant competitor, Draco Malfoy, tries to attack Dumbledore, and the book ends with the killing of Dumbledore by Professor Snape.

J. K. Rowling brings her seven-part, sweeping story to its dramatic conclusion in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, a tense and arresting story that moves at great pace. It shows the unavoidable terminal confrontation between now-seventeen-year-old Harry and the evil wizard Voldemort. The last book in the series begins directly after the events of the sixth book. Voldemort gains control of the Ministry of Magic. Harry, Ron, and Hermione drop out of school so that they can discover Voldemort's remaining dangerous remaining Horcruxes. To ensure their well-being as well as that of their family and friends, they are compelled to isolate themselves.

As they hunt for the Horcruxes, the three friends learn details about Dumbledore's past, as well as Snape's true intentions. The book ends in the Battle of Hogwarts. Harry, Ron, and Hermione, in together with the members of the *Order of the Phoenix* and many of the teachers and students, protect Hogwarts from Voldemort, and his supporters. Many characters are killed in the first wave of the battle and Voldemort again plans to kill Harry.

To protect the survivors, Harry surrenders himself, but the battle resumes as the parents of many Hogwarts students, many from the village Hogsmeade, and other magical creatures come to reinforce the Order of the Phoenix. Then Harry comes back from the dead. With the last Horcrux destroyed, Harry finally confronts Voldemort. Harry gives the dark lord a chance to repent, but Voldemort pays no heed to this and tries to kill Harry one last time. Finally, Voldemort dies.

I would thus, like to conclude that, combining many traditional elements of fantasy fiction and the fairy tale, Rowling's stories offer a familiar backdrop for readers who can empathize with a young protagonist adrift in a sometimes cruel and challenging world. Full of clever wit, sly humour, high imagination, and brilliant invention, Rowling creates a world of mystery and magic. Critics affirm that the Potter books are truly inventive and show an acute sense of child psychology. While targeted chiefly at a younger market, many adults have found the series to be a compelling, adventurous read, and take delight in the many humorous, macabre, and occasionally violent episodes. It goes without saying that in an age when we are 'constantly being told that the printed word is dying, J.K. Rowling defied the received wisdom.

Thus, we see that woven around the motifs of the power of love, man's struggle against death, and the relationship between Harry and his mentor Dumbledore the Harry Potter series is easily one of the most important and influential books of the late 20th and early 21st century that epitomizes the narrative experience of one entire generation.

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