

Harry Potter
and the Empire of
Dementia

A Case Study

by

Peter Dudink

Acknowledgements

I thank all the professors and teachers who gave me nourishment, and I thank all my friends and family for their support and patience.

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List of Abbreviations

HP = *Harry Potter* (considered as a series)

The books, in numerical order:

1. *TPS* = *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*
2. *TCOS* = *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*
3. *TPOA* = *Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban*
4. *TGOF* = *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
5. *TOP* = *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*
6. *THBP* = *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
7. *TDH* = *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

PREFACE

“*Don’t ask questions*” – that was the rule at the Dursley household, but its power extends far beyond.

[T]he trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things which are worst for them. (*TPS 215*)

Surprisingly, the Potter series has not inspired a wave of satanic and pagan cults, but before we give the proverbial sigh of relief, consider the following unsettling questions: What if graver problems than witchcraft exist? What if the Potter series has helped us forget them? What if we discovered that Rowling’s beloved books represented a powerful potion produced by mixing 1) the reality-sweetening techniques of propaganda and advertising with 2) the perceptions and feelings of someone suffering from paranoid schizophrenia and narcissistic personality disorder?

And what if these questions hint at the secret of Harry Potter’s powerful *spell* on the modern child’s imagination?

To understand why the Potter series seems so ‘real’ or spellbinding to young readers one must reflect on this powerful paradox: *Harry’s fantasy world contains an unparalleled amount of the real world*. Gadgets, banks, trains, sports, gambling, automobiles, headmasters and so on—all apparently lifted out of the 20th century and *sweetened* with a pinch of

fantasy. The ‘fantasy’ series is also unique because its characters exhibit behaviours that mimic and *conserve* all the weaknesses and ills we find in the real world, among children and adults.

How else does one explain a series that, for example, sweetens the reality of animal abuse by making the exploitation of Harry’s mail-owl seem oh-so cute and neat? How else does one explain a series that constantly pushes readers through a revolving Reality-Fantasy door, for example, by directing our attention to real, headline problems like terrorism (see the opening pages of *The Half-Blood Prince*) while drawing the reader into a fantasy world whose solutions to terrorism are useless and serve only to help readers escape from the moral responsibility?

I can hear my critics laughing, “Oh please, it’s just a children’s fantasy series! Don’t spoil the fun!” I’m sorry, but when a children’s series makes beer drinking, bad tempers, violence, the exploitation of animals and workers, seem ‘interesting,’ cute and even funny, then we must give pause. If we can criticize corporations for pursuing young consumers with gigantic marketing machines, why shouldn’t we be critical when a talented author pursues or attracts young readers by making violent conflicts, a dangerous sport (Quidditch), underage driving, the banking industry and many more highly questionable behaviours and institutions seem cute, awesome, fantastical or slightly humorous?

Even the issue of orphan abuse, or—to be accurate—‘Harry’ abuse, as we find it in the Potter series, serves only to elicit pity from the reader for the hero, and that sweetens the hero, makes him seem more righteous. The spell of pity, however, leads readers to entirely overlook the psychological reading that a disturbed childhood often leads to a number of mental disorders, many of which parallel the world, feelings and behavior of our dear Harry Potter.

In contrast to Harry, Hermione is a beacon of sanity. In the fourth book she actually engages in a bit of non-self-serving social activism by investigating the rights of the kitchen staff at Hogwarts. Had she pursued this more actively, the whole story would have been derailed, and so her interest and the episode is quickly abandoned, not to be revived until she escapes from Hogwarts.

Given Harry’s persistent and tortured battle to escape from the real world, Harry, one might conclude, is a sort of ailing Peter Pan, a boy hero who leads his readers into a Neverland contaminated with reality. Nevertheless, as bizarre as this sounds, his school is his escape, even an escape into a world more horrific than the real world. I found this deranged habit so frustrating that between books I always wondered, *Has Harry grown up and become a beacon to young consciences around the world?* I even tried not to read the fifth book, but at last curiosity seized me and I peeked through the first pages. There he was, poor Harry, lying in a bed of flowers, beside a window, ignoring a blaring news

report about the drought and heat wave devastating the Muggle world!!
And where was his mind? Probably with Voldemort. *That* was
devastating.

But seriously, given Harry's education, is it right to expect more
maturity from him? I doubt it. Still, I remain ever hopeful and *vigilant* for
the day when he returns, not necessarily to solve the world's problems,
not even to offer readers the medicine of laughter, but—simply to face
and wrestle with the real...

ORIGINAL PREFACE

People used to think that learning to read evidenced human progress ... the important thing is not to be able to read, but to understand what one reads, to reflect on and judge what one reads. (Ellul. *Propaganda* 108)

According to Northrop Fry, “Any work of fiction written during the last two centuries will reflect the secondary and ideological concerns of its time” (*Words with Power* 43). Rowling’s work is no exception. The *Harry Potter* series conserves, imitates, and reproduces the current, dominant secular ideology, those values or beliefs that Jacques Ellul, in *Propaganda*, calls Western myths. This means that, despite providing imaginative variations of our empirical world, *HP* exhibits a deplorable lack of imagination on a more significant level, the cultural and ideological one. Religious conservatives might complain that *HP* promotes Satanism and witchcraft, but it does far more to promote harmful secular myths and values with so much artistry that they are sweetened, refreshed, and *glorified* as all propaganda glorifies ideology.

Among the beliefs conserved in *HP* are the beliefs that the forces of good have the right to commit violence, animal abuse, self-glorification and the right to escape from social and environmental problems, as Harry does again and again. *HP* also conserves the belief or the “myth of Youth [and] the myth of the Hero” (Ellul 40), and the belief that we must not “reflect on [our] actions [because] [a]ction must come from the depths

of the unconscious” (181). Western media-driven propaganda reinforces these beliefs by appealing to our desire to identify with a hero or political leader (173) and by appealing to our desire to raise ourselves above the non-human environment. According to Ellul, such propaganda creates modern democratic citizens who “repeat indefinitely ‘the sacred formulas of democracy’ while acting like a [Nazi] storm trooper” (256). This is an important point not because *HP* is propaganda, but because many similarities exist between Ellul’s vision of propaganda and this analysis of *HP*.

In order to deflate the *Harry Potter* media hype, this paper will look at how, on the surface, *HP* conserves and glorifies harmful ideologies and cultural norms; while, just beneath the surface, the series mocks and parodies the same traditions it appears to conserve and provides endless evidence that Harry Potter is, at best, mentally deficient.

- CHAPTER ONE -

Psychology and Injustice

I. Introduction

Harry Potter's 'reality' closely coincides with the symptoms of widely recognized psychological disorders, specifically paranoia, schizophrenia and narcissistic personality disorder.

Madness and Harry Potter are one: this is a grave diagnosis, even a grave accusation. Before we accept it, let us step back and consider the problems that Harry's lawyers might highlight. They might and should argue that Harry is not mad because he *really* is persecuted by a villain and a shadowy ministry, and because the school bully who bugs him *really* is in cahoots with an supernatural villain, and because that Harry's parents *really* were heroes who left him a pile of gold bullion, and because he *really* does save the world and the voices in his head are *real* and so on and so on.

Unfortunately, paranoiacs, schizophrenics and persons suffering from narcissistic personality disorder also believe that everything they imagine is *real*. Moreover, the reality/delusion issue is secondary. My

primary concern is that children are *enjoying* a fictional experience that is indistinguishable from the real experiences of psychiatric patients.

Two questions arise from this troubling conclusion: first, what has predisposed children to identify with such a character? Second, will their identification with him promote their sanity or insanity?

Such questions, of course, don't belong in a work of literary criticism, but I wished to raise them before readers began perusing my literary evidence of Harry's unsuitability as a hero and role model. Admittedly, the evidence isn't always consistent with the symptoms of any known psychiatric disorder, but even then, I think it might raise questions about Harry's suitability as a hero and role model.

II. The Unjust Worlds

Injustice lies at the root Harry's psyche. His parents were murdered when he was 15 months and his stepfamily, while indulging in gastronomic excesses, seems malicious, paranoid, and without any ability to nurture a young mind. Psychologists understand that childhood conditions like these can cause people to suffer the kind of delusions experienced by Harry, and, as is true of Harry's delusions fantasy world, this world is often as frightening as the real world. Harry might escape into a fantasy world, but this fantasy conserves and replicates the world he seeks to escape. Its prisons replace the Dursley

closet, incidents of magical-corporeal punishment replace spankings, murder replaces murder, criminals proliferate, Malfoy replaces young Dursley, and so on and so on.

The harmful effect of life in at Hogwarts spares no one, not even Hermione. Enraged at Malfoy for mocking Hagrid “[s]he had slapped Malfoy around the face with all the strength she could muster. Malfoy staggered” (*TPOA* 216). Yes, Malfoy staggered, but he was not improved. In fact, what Hermione did was entirely inappropriate and silly. It was silly because Hagrid is an adult and a giant, and therefore should defend his own ego. It was inappropriate because Hermione could have reported Malfoy to Dumbledore or could have organized a fantastically massive and non-violent student protest against bullying. She could even have redirected Malfoy’s negative energy with a joke or a question about why Malfoy hopes to accomplish by mocking a giant. But Hogwarts has not taught her such useful skills, and its professors also resort to violence, so what else could we expect?

Thanks to the media, children witness so much violence that they cannot possibly respond emotively to violence or learn to reflect on the causes and consequences of violence. Consequently, they have little choice but to put their faith in effortless and instantaneous religious and secular solutions. Take Azkaban as an example. Half Hell and half prison, it is the ultimate fantasy solution to crime. But Rowling’s Azkaban is such an extreme solution that it also sounds like a critique

of prison justice. The prisoners in Azkaban frequently lose their minds. The Dementors, its prison guards, “suck peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them” [187 *TPA*]. And the shady minister of justice is Fudge, a man whose name belies his habit of fudging the truth. Sadly, this inhumane, corrupt and all-too-real world is Harry’s *fantasy world!* Small wonder then, that fear and paranoia dominate his life.

The author might have implied a criticism of prison justice, but the young characters do not, and Harry and friends learn to ignore it. Thus, when Harry desires personal revenge against an adult, Sirius, Hermione dissuades him by saying, “There’s nothing you can do! ... The Dementors will catch Black and he’ll go back to Azkaban [i.e. prison]” (*TPOA* 159). Harry answers, “He [Black] can go to Azkaban ... just don’t kill him” (275). Now Harry also wants him back in prison. Has he forgotten how he felt when he was locked in the Dursley closet? “Just don’t kill him” – Why not, when death might be preferable? In other words, Harry’s plea to spare Black’s life is a case of pity and good intentions paving the way to the worst possible outcome. But what else would you expect from a young man whose school teaches him nothing about the world’s justice system and does nothing to teach students the art of how to think calmly and objectively about personal and upsetting matters?

Dumbledore provides the shallowest façade of experience and wisdom. Although he says “[t]he consequences of our actions are always

so complicated, so diverse” (311) he neglects to illustrate and teach this, and neglects to provide it correlative, that the *causes* are also complicated and diverse, and that blaming the immediate agent of a crime is simplistic. And so the story goes: Lord Voldemort killed Harry’s parents because they were half-bloods, but we never learn why he hates half-bloods or what role his childhood and his education had in shaping his mind.

Other images of normalized violence include acts of violence committed during the Quidditch matches. As in rugby, hockey, American football, boxing, and other sports, Quidditch violence is excused on the grounds of being a normal and acceptable expression of the desire for victory. Scenes of graphic violence include: “Flint’s nose smashed into the handle of his broom and began to bleed”; and “Bole and Derrick collided with a sickening crunch” (*TPOA* 226, 227). While these collisions have a visceral effect they elicit no moral indignation from the characters or the narrator. Bludgers are expected to harm other players, and the Slytherin team perpetrates most of the illicit violence in order to win their matches without skill. Perhaps their failure was intended as a moral lesson about cheating, it is not a moral lesson about violence, as the game requires violence.

Superficially speaking, the Weasley twins’ failure to use magic to cheat their way into the Triwizard Tournament is both a critique of unjust uses of magic and of cheating in general. However, the nature of

their punishment is both magical and violent, and not in proportion to the crime: “[they are] hurled out of the golden circle” and land “painfully, ten feet away on the cold stone floor” (*TGOF* 229). The result seems to describe the consequence of an exploding land mine or a charging bull, and its use in a school tournament is unjustifiable and sets a woeful example for students.

After Sirius Black persuades Harry that he is the boy’s protector and that the unconscious Professor Snape is his true enemy, he uses the spectacle of magic to normalize his sadistic treatment of Snape’s body: “[it] kept bumping his lolling head on the low ceiling”; and “Snape’s head was scraping the ceiling but Sirius didn’t seem to care” (*TPOA* 277, 278). This violence goes unpunished yet so unnecessary, unwarranted, and gratuitous, especially in children’s literature, I shudder to guess at the author’s intentions—or lack thereof.

From Sirius’ Black’s treatment of Snape, Malfoy, and Ron, we know Sirius is no pacifist. Nevertheless, Black criticises Crouch, the minister of magic, for fighting “violence with violence [and for authorising] the use of the Unforgivable Curses against suspects” (*TGOF* 457). This sounds hypocritical coming from Sirius, and it ironically hypocritical (a new species of irony?) in a book that relies so heavily on violent scenes.

Does Rowling make a mockery of the penal justice system and, in doing so, satirize it and imply a critical position? Consider that Sirius Black and Hagrid are unjustly imprisoned, and Sirius Black and Peter

Pettigrew escape. Moreover, the legal trials witnessed by Harry through the Pensieve do not reflect well on the legal process (see *TGOF* 509-518). And Karkaroff betrays his own friends in the hope of receiving a lighter sentence; Bagman's sentence is retracted on account of his status as a celebrity; and without a fair trial Crouch condemns four people, his son included, to life in prison. All these acts of 'justice' make a mockery of justice, and with the exception of the last one, they are they are completely realistic. Of course, this realism highlights the worst aspects of our justice system, and in that sense they seem calculated to criticize, and given the nature of the educational environment, we can easily surmise the reason for the *in*justice system. The nature of education and justice in Harry's world is hardly hidden from the children who read Rowling's words, but if they have not taken critical notice of their nature, and continue floating like zombies through Harry-world, and Rowling profits from it, and our teachers and librarians take no notice, whose behaviour is begging for correction?

The failed execution of Hagrid's Hippogriff reads like a critique of the death penalty and of the deadly method whereby governments deal with wild and domestic animals. While violent and cruel over-reactions are rampant through the series, the Hippogriff is a notable exception, and, unlike Harry, barely harms Malfoy after being insulted by him. While I believe a healthy ego should be immune to verbal insults, and that no reaction was warranted by the offended Hippogriff, Malfoy's complaint to

the authorities results in a death sentence—for the Hippogriff.

Fortunately, Harry, Ron and Hermione come to the rescue. In fact, they do more to try to save the poor mythological beast than they do to save any Earthly creature, humans included. Thus, again and again, the subtext heaps irony upon absurdity and hypocrisy, until the whole hodgepodge achieves the effect of something quite hard to define.

“It happened in a flash of steely talons; Malfoy let out a high pitched scream and ... lay curled in the grass, blood blossoming over his robes” (*TPOA* 90). The metaphorical “blood blossoming” links the botanical world to a violent form of justice. The floral metaphor beautifies the violence. The metaphor is reminiscent of ones found in *The Illiad* and *The Song of Roland*, about which we might also ask: Why did their authors endeavour to normalize and beautify an avoidable violence by comparing it to a normal event like the blossoming of flowers?

In addition to seducing readers with metaphors, Rowling normalizes violence and vengeance with a tasteless veneer of comedy that includes scenes of blowing people up—presumably with air (*TPS*) and a car crash into a ‘dangerous’ tree (The Whomping Willow). And, consider the following:

There was a dazzling flash of scarlet light and Lockhart was blasted off his feet: he flew backwards off the stage, smashed into the wall and slid down it to sprawl on the floor. ...

“Do you think he’s alright?”

“Who cares?” said Harry and Ron together. (TCOS 142)

Perhaps this is supposed to be funny, or perhaps vain Lockhart’s ‘misfortune’ is something young readers can gloat over. And yet, even to call it a misfortune is to overlook the point that Snape’s violent reaction was unwarranted and unjust, and that Harry and Ron’s crass indifference to injustice is reprehensible.

III. Harry’s Fall into Violence

While Harry Potter may not be a psychopath any more than, say, certain publicly supported military forces, his frequent recourse to violence in the name of justice is not acceptable and does not represent a plausible solution to anything. Why, in contrast to many other fantasy heroes, does Harry resort to violence? Why else, but to resolve conflict. As an action-fantasy hero, he *must* resolve conflicts, well, not conflicts between others (he is hardly capable of resolving problems between others; he is too self-centered and, in his defense, he’s too young) but strictly conflicts between himself and others.

Interestingly, while Harry starts with no ability to even address the conflict with his stepfamily, in his fantasy world he confronts a villain of

mythological proportions. Plus, he suddenly develops a method of addressing conflict—namely violence and magic, which are essentially the same thing here.

Harry's increasing dependency on violence shouldn't surprise us. In *TCOS* we witness violence between the fathers of two students. Mr Malfoy and Mr Weasley argue and come to blows before a group of children. The fight is instantly resolved by the timely physical intervention of a more powerful being, the semi-giant Hagrid. Scenes wherein parents and professors behave like three-year olds are common, and consequently Harry naturally becomes like them. In Harry's magical world, the best adult role models offer no alternatives to the violent solution that is, at best, a temporary solution and is, at worst, a curse on imagination and conscience.

Harry's frequent recourse to violence is shocking because initially he is not disposed to commit violence. In the first book, when he first loses his temper, he uses the harmless Tickling Charm against Malfoy (*TCOS* 145). And, in the same book, he prevents Ron from committing violence.

The second book tells a different tale. Harry has turned to uttering death threats at Dobby the elf: "You'd better clear off before my bones come back, Dobby, or I might strangle you" (133).

In the third book, during Aunt Marge's visit to the Dursleys, Harry tries to suppress his temper "by forcing himself to think about his *Handbook of Do-it-Yourself Broomcare*" (*TPOA* 25). But this method fails,

and Harry takes vengeance against Aunt Marge with magic. She immediately inflates “like a monstrous balloon” and floats to the ceiling (27). Later, Harry throws a punch that “collided with the side of Black’s head” (*TPOA* 249, 250). The narrator speculates that Black was caught off guard because of the “shock of Harry doing something so stupid” (249). In what sense is it stupid? Immediately prior to the stupid punch the bemused and bemusing narrator tells us that Harry had become so angry that he forgot he was “short and skinny and thirteen.” The point might not be that children should postpone violence until they are big adults, but that anger leads to stupidity. A valid and commendable point to make in a book of children’s literature, but the point is poorly communicated and flagrantly ignored by the hero’s leading obsession with Lord Voldemort.

In the fourth book, when Harry cannot remember a password, he desperately invents one after another, still fails to get past the stone gargoyle, and kicks it so hard that he achieves “nothing but an excruciating pain in his big toe” (502). Later, Malfoy’s insults cause him so much rage that Harry loses the power to speak, and he uses a painful magical curse against Malfoy (*TGOF* 262). When Malfoy mocks Hagrid, Harry uses his magical invisibility cloak to commit a ‘dirty trick’ by throwing a mud-ball at Malfoy’s head and a slime-ball at Crabbe and Goyle. In the last chapter, Malfoy mocks, or rather teases, Harry and Hermione, and for this relatively harmless gesture Harry, Hermione, and

Ron retaliate disproportionately, striking Malfoy unconscious and inflicting the same cruelty on his two friends—*and*, still not satisfied, they “kick, roll, and push” them (633). Can we still speak of heroism after all this? Why, not one of Harry’s ill-conceived reactions will solve anything; they only guarantee that he will continue suffer, perhaps more than ever.

Books five through seven hardly reverse the trend, in fact, the trend culminates with the epic final solution over Lord Voldemort.

In conclusion, Harry Potter’s descent into violence does more than blur the difference between good and evil, it challenges us to complicate simplified notions of the moral order in *HP*. And, if his descent into violence does not suffice to show that Alan Nesbit was wrong to praise *HP* on the grounds that “[i]n the epic battle between good and evil, good always wins” (*Perspectives* 5), then nothing is.

Ultimately, we need to stop reading *HP* as a simple narrative of good versus evil and understand that the poles are constantly in flux. If we can be critical of Dudley’s love of blowing up imaginary aliens (*TPS* 35), we can be even more critical of Harry for ‘blowing up’ his aunt and for approaching other problems in a similar manner.

IV. Harry’s Verbal Deficiency

A person diagnosed with schizophrenia may demonstrate auditory hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized and unusual thinking and speech; this may range from loss of train of thought and subject flow, with sentences only loosely connected in meaning, to incoherence[.] *Wikipedia. Scizophrenia (Aug. 17, 09)*

Harry Potter is a poor speaker and *a poor organiser of words*. In his first recorded attempt to converse, despite being ten years old he speaks like an infant. In what can hardly be called a conversation, Harry contributes a one-word sentence, a groan, and an incomplete sentence of two identical words (*TPS 20*). Regrettably, his Hogwarts education includes no language classes and so, is unlikely to improve his speaking or thinking skills. And, considering his stepparents and the nature of a Hogwarts education, poor Harry has little hope of improving.

Rowling suggests that violent language and violent actions are not far removed. In the first instance, the narrator says of Harry, “The injustice of it made him want to curse Snape into a thousand slimy pieces” (*TGOF 263*). The second line shows that Harry cannot distinguish words and violence, and relates to them as being morally indistinguishable: “Harry ... wasn’t sure whether he wanted to talk to him or hit him, both seemed quite appealing” (273). In other words, Harry’s inability to do anything

intelligent with language, and his growing dependency on violence, might be linked.

A symptom of narcissistic personality disorder is the inability to entertain criticism and, consequently, a predisposition to violent overreactions. Thus, when the three ruffians Malfoy, Goyle, and Crabbe attempt to make Harry their friend and tell him that *Ron* is the *wrong* friend, Harry misses the pun entirely. Moreover, since he hardly knows Ron he might at least ask why they seem critical of his choice, and not reply with this flatfooted bit of sarcasm: “I think I can tell who the *wrong* sort are for myself, thanks” (*TPS* 81; italics mine). His response betrays an excessive sensitivity and vulnerability to criticism and a narcissistic personality disorder, a fact which naturally goes unnoticed by young readers being raised in a culture where self-esteem is an advertised right and rarely distinguishable from narcissism? Moreover, where would our children learn the skills needed to respond better than Harry? At our schools?

Harry and company, who cannot bear being criticized or teased by anyone, regularly and without hesitation, call others “stupid” (*TPS* 25, *TGOF* 35, 54, 313, 394). Perhaps Rowling’s insensitive young readers enjoy this kind of schoolyard trash talk and have not considered how they would feel on the receiving end. Of course, Rowling is partly to blame for doing so little to encourage a change in perspective.

On the subject of insensitivity, consider how Harry treats Draco Malfoy. When Malfoy finds Neville's glassy eye-like "Remembrall" in the grass, Harry, being quick to judge, assumes Draco will do something wrong with it. "Give that here, Malfoy," Harry says, addressing the boy with the impolite moniker, the boy's surname. "Give it *here!*" Harry adds before adding an antagonizing threat for good measure: "or I'll knock you off that broom!" (TPS 110). And all this might have been avoided if Harry had explained that little glass objects are not worth fighting for, even if those objects mirror your *serised*.

In the third book Harry has another encounter with Malfoy. This time Malfoy mocks Harry's friend Hagrid, and Harry, with a characteristically stupid response, says, "Shut up, Malfoy" (87). Draco continues, and Harry repeats his most common refrain in the entire series, "Shut up, Malfoy." How ironic that a boy lacking verbal skills resorts to trying to censor what others say. While such responses pass for conscientious rebuttals, they actually ensure conflict. A more ideal, or shall I say fantastic response would consist of a deflection by turning the mockery upon oneself or by inquiring exactly what Malfoy hopes to accomplish by insulting a giant.

When Snape says that Harry's father strutted, Harry denies it. But Snape speaks from memory, while Harry only speaks from desire. So, when Snape continues to dismantle Harry's idealized father-image Harry shouts "SHUT UP!" and "I told you to shut up about my dad!" (TPOA 209-

10) A few chapters later Harry has a vision of a horse that saves him from some Dementors. First Harry idealizes this vision by assuming that the horse is his father, but afterwards he finds an even more flattering interpretation: he assumes that the horse symbolises himself, and he brags, "I just saved all our lives" (301). In other words, Harry's verbal deficiency is a product of his narcissistic personality disorder.

In the fourth book Harry's intellect still shows no signs of progress. When Draco jokes about Ron Weasley's house, Harry says, "Get stuffed, Malfoy" (180). The metaphorical "Get stuffed" might be more poetical than the earlier colloquial "Shut up!" but it is not good poetry, indeed, as if to assure us that he has not changed, Harry follows his "Get stuffed!" with the brilliant "Keep your fat mouth shut" (180). Harry's repertoire of insulting language might be developing, but this hardly validates three-years at Hogwarts.

How to Help Children with Common Problems will show that many common problems, including daydreaming, coincide with Harry's and, by extension, with any reader who identifies with him. In *Artful Mediation*, the authors list five causes of violent and awful conflicts. Harry's behaviour closely corresponds to two, and less to two others. They are, respectively,

Avoiding direct discussion.

Wishing the conflict (or the other person) would go away.

Forming coalitions with others and complaining about the opposition.

Unrelenting rounds of “dirty” tricks to make others look foolish ... just to get even. (Yarbrough & Wilmot 2)

Harry’s verbal deficiency is usually exhibited in response to jibes that would be relatively harmless to an intelligent child. But Harry is not intelligent. Given his fluency in Parseltongue, he might not be entirely human. And Rowling teasingly jokes at Harry’s expense by associating him with spiders, first by suggesting that he is comfortable living with spiders in the cupboard beneath the Dursley stairs, and by repeatedly reminding us that the black spider who lived in the Secret Chamber is hairy: “hairy body” (184), “mad and hairy” (186), hairy legs” and “hairy, gigantic” (204). If this isn’t sufficient, the good author informs us that, as a baby Harry’s head had “a tuft of jet-black hair” and that, ten years later, he “must have had more haircuts than the rest of the boys in his class put together, but it made no difference, his hair simply grew that way – all over the place” (*TPS* 16, 20-21).

V. Harry’s Mental Deficiency

Paranoia is a thought process characterized by excessive anxiety or fear, often to the point of irrationality and delusion. Paranoid thinking typically includes persecutory beliefs concerning a perceived threat towards oneself [...] that the person is on a special quest or has been chosen by God; [...] that shadowy agencies are operating against them.

Dictionary of psychology – Dictionary-psychology.com Aug.-17-09.

Although the evidence collected in this section is redundant, we absolutely must entertain Joanne's claim that Harry is smart (Newsweek 23) and not dismiss it as the product of maternal pride.

One eminent commentator with no relation to Harry, and therefore more likely to view him objectively, has written the following: "Harry learns nothing from his mistakes about his teacher [Snape]" (Tucker 226). To be honestly, even Harry's fellow students know he is not a top student (*TGOF* 276). During Professor Trelawney's class, Harry's thoughts drifted because "the perfumed fire always made him feel sleepy and dull-witted, and Professor Trelawney ... never held him exactly spellbound" (177). Actually, Harry *is* spellbound by the professor's words; he cannot stop "thinking about what she had just said to him." Just how he thinks about her words is not clear; however, judging from the

italicised verbatim repetition of her words, Harry's notion of thinking about a Professor's words means senselessly repeating them.

Certain 'extra-curricular subjects' also exceed his mental ability. When he hears new details about the murder of his parents his "brain seemed to be sagging under the weight of what he was hearing" (*TPOA* 267). When Harry finds his favourite professor preparing to leave, we find Harry "trying to think of a good argument to make him stay," and failing because he cannot admit the truth about his love for Lupin (*TPOA* 309). And Harry "was finding it hard to think about the future at all" (*TGOF* 275). When someone asks him if he has reflected on the fact that many champions die, he implies the negative. Hermione struggles to teach him the Summoning Charm, and the narrator tells us that Harry had "developed something of a block about them" (278). From all this evidence we can surmise that one special emotion dominates Harry's mind, not love but fear, a fear of death so powerful that his mind has become afraid of itself, of its own power to "summon" or imagine monsters, a mind which, nevertheless, requires objects of fear that, unlike death, it can defeat or control. However, until he learns to understand death, he won't have sufficient control over his own mind to ensure that it does not lead him into a living nightmare (Rowling has said that the name of Hagrid, the giant who led Harry into his dreamworld, comes from a word for nightmare).

Harry's fantasy world is more than a nightmare; it is also the tragic fulfillment of his desire to escape. Concerning this fantasy world, Dumbledore says,

It [is] nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts ... However, [it] will give us neither knowledge or truth. ... It does not do to *dwell* on dreams and forget to live, *remember* that. (TPS 157; italics mine).

Clearly, Dumbledore counsels Harry to return to the real world and *get a life* as the children say.

Unfortunately, Harry seems to misinterpret Dumbledore's advice not to dwell on the symbolic reflecting glass (after Lewis Carroll's looking-glass). Instead of understanding it as I have, he makes no effort to return to or reflect on the real world he chooses not to *reflect* on anything.

Harry's thoughtlessness results in an inability to articulate his thoughts, thoughts that hardly exist, of course. In the following quote Harry claims to be thinking, but judge for yourself: "‘Sir?’ said Harry. ‘I’ve been thinking ... Sir – even if the Stone’s gone, Vol – I mean’ (TPS 215-16). After Harry finally verbalises his badly organized thoughts Dumbledore tells him that Voldemort is still alive, and apparently this thought, combined with the action of nodding, "made [Harry's] head hurt."

In Chapter Fifteen of *TGOF* we learn that Harry’s “sleeping brain had been working on [a plan] all night” (201). This plan, however, is the rather stupid one of denying, in a letter to Sirius, that his scar ever hurt. And despite the fact that the throbbing scar is most certainly a schizophrenic’s symptom, in this same letter he insists “*my head feels completely normal.*” Nevertheless, Rowling sweetens the comedy by writing, some three pages later, that a voice in Harry’s head has told him that his desire to jump is stupid (i.e. not normal).

Fear is really part of desire, as objects of desire help diffuse energies repressed by fear, and anything one desires one is determined to fear losing. As a young male student at Hogwarts, Harry naturally desires a pretty girl, and suffers from the common fear of losing the girl he desires. Thanks to this inner torment, he sounds particularly stupid in her presence (*TGOF* 223) and when his mind is on her (338). When she, Cho Chang, wishes him well, he is speechless and feels “extremely stupid” (277). Utterly distracted by her, and possibly afraid to reveal his unathletic body, he—ironically— forgets to disrobe for the second task and swims in his robe.

Although Harry considers writing to Dumbledore about his throbbing scar, he thinks that “[e]ven in his head the words sounded stupid” (25). This is odd. While this represents a rare instance of self-criticism, either he knows that no one else believes in his scar (except for the narrator, no one in the series notices it), or he is an incompetent writer (a likely

possibility given his ‘education’). However, when fear of Voldemort overcomes his shame of admitting his fear, he makes the dubious decision to write to Sirius instead. In that letter he criticises his cousin for destroying the one gadget that helped him “take his mind off things” (27). What a hypocrite! Taking his mind off “things” (i.e. Voldemort, i.e. death) is precisely what Harry decides to do when he accepts the invitation to the inane Quidditch World Cup.

During the Quidditch World Cup, Harry meets the ultimate distraction for a young man with much mental work to do, a girl. Mesmerized by the sexy Veela, “half formed thoughts started chasing through Harry’s dazed mind”, inspiring him to do something really courageous, I mean stupid (94), which he accidentally does by losing his phallic symbol, his wand, of course.

Lack of empathy is listed as a symptom of narcissistic personality disorder, but it is likely symptomatic of a variety of disorders, the Harry Potter Disorder included. Consider his lack of empathy when, upon learning of poor Ron’s jealousy, he responds with self-pitying anger. More pointedly, when Hermione tries to help Harry think he cries, “will you shut up for a bit, please? I’m trying to concentrate.” But “all that happened, when Hermione fell silent, was that Harry’s brain filled with a sort of blank buzzing” (*TGOF* 296).

In “The Pensieve” Harry admits he’s never been pensive, and in the next chapter his head reels with thoughts he cannot organize because he

has no *sieve* to strain them with, and no pen with which to “siphon them off” for study. Two pages later, Hermione expresses her frustration with his brain, which does not seem to work, and has again forgotten that Muggle “things don’t work around Hogwarts” (*TGOF* 529).

In “The Egg and the Eye” Harry’s brain receives a rare compliment from—of all people—the mentally unstable, paranoid Moody. This needs no further comment.

How can we reconcile the fact that Harry is so stunningly stupid with the upside-down fact that he solves the Sphinx’s riddle in the Third Task (*TGOF*)? Look closely and note that, prior to finding the Sphinx, the “world turned upside-down” for Harry (542). Indeed! Suddenly, quite inexplicably, Harry demonstrates independence and intelligence by solving the Sphinx’s riddle unaided!!! Nothing could be more upside-down.

Does Harry improve in books 5-7? Does he come to terms with death? In *TOTP*, when Sirius dies, instead of exhibiting grace and maturity, he is deeply disturbed and is too proud to show it and ask for help. Dumbledore notices and attempts to console him by saying he shares his feelings about Sirius, and Harry, instead of ignoring this rather useless gesture, experiences “white-hot anger like his insides, blazing in the terrible emptiness, filling him with the desire to hurt Dumbledore for his calmness and his empty words” (823). Amazingly, some critics consider this mental aberration and over-reaction nothing to

worry about, and readers hardly blink. But, for goodness sake, how hopeless are we when we expect the worst from our heroes?

Luckily Harry grows up to be quite a model young man, marrying Ginny (please note that Ginny is the *wrong* girl; her name invokes the spirit of ‘gin,’ so marriage to her implies Harry has grown up to be a good, alcohol-loving Brit). Plus, Harry lands a job at the Ministry of Magic, an institution which—in keeping with its name—is steeped in deception, trickery and *fudgery*. Yeah.

In the end, does Harry come to terms with death? In her CBC interview with Shelagh Rogers, Joanne raised our hopes for a solution by saying, “I think it would be fair to say that in book five [Harry] has to *examine* what death means, in ever closer ways [italics mine].” In her words, he has too, but does he? It would be in vain if he did, for nothing in his education and nothing in his recreational reading and nothing he does with his time could ever prepare him for that *examination*.

VI. Harry’s Education

Although Rowling patterned Hogwarts, the school of magic, after the traditional “Gothic-style boarding school” (Tucker 222), Hogwarts’ curriculum *seems* very fantastical; it includes Herbology, History, Muggle Studies, Care of Magical Creatures, Potions, Defence Against

the Dark Arts and Divination. It *seems* fantastical because in actuality Hogwarts is, in many respects, very modernized. With its co-ed classes, telescopes, pseudo-science classes, and its emphasis on preparing students for jobs, Hogwarts operates more like a cog in the modern English public education system than like a Gothic boarding school or medieval cathedral school. The fact that Harry and friends are usually bored with their classes, and often express justified contempt for their professors, evidences Rowling's appeal to the nearly universal experience of being a frustrated and powerless student. Children particularly are guaranteed to identify with characters who suffer in school and feel above their teachers. Ultimately, *HP* conserves the modern educational system as a necessary means for Muggle-borns to win secure government jobs, as Harry does in *TDH*.

Our first educators, our parents, discourage us from asking "Why?" through their inability to turn 'maddening' questions into the beginning of pleasant banter and thoughtful discussions that lead to inner strength. The Dursleys are an entirely typical example of parents who do not nourish intelligence and imagination, they are so typical that when readers learn about the first rule in the Dursley household, "*Don't ask questions,*" they are tempted to smile and think, *Those stupid Dursleys! I'm glad I don't live with them!* What hypocrites we are. What home and what school encourages introspection, self-criticism, and hard and inconvenient questions?

In reality, the schools to which we entrust our children are no more effective than Hogwarts. Rowling provides no evidence, at any time, of its professors encouraging students to ask questions, master language, discuss social issues, or even study logic. “Why don’t they teach logic at these schools?” (*The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe* 47), asked Lewis’ professor. How Hermione developed a knack for logic (see “Through the Trapdoor”) and how her conscience survived Hogwarts, is the greatest mystery of the series.

If we discount the value of Dumbledore’s minimal role as an intellectual advisor, Harry has no mentor, only de-mentors. Even snakes, despite being symbols of wisdom in ancient mythologies (and even Jesus said “be as shrewd as snakes” (Matt. 10:16)), are useless to Harry. Rowling’s snake shows no sign of wisdom and is employed merely as a pop-culture symbol of fear. Even Harry’s ability to communicate with snakes is not a sign of intelligence, as the narrator clearly warns when Harry shouts “*stupidly* at the snake, ‘Leave him!’” (TCOS 145; italics mine).

The inspiration behind ‘Hogwarts’ was very likely the word ‘hogwash’— though ‘warthog’ may also take some credit, but given the English tendency to pronounce ‘wash’ as ‘warsh,’ hogwarsh deserves more credit. Besides, hogwash makes more sense in the context of education, and absolutely agrees with the deprecatory spirit of the school’s chant:

'Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,

Teach us something please ...

Our heads could do with filling

With some interesting stuff ...

So teach us things worth knowing,

Bring back what we've forgot,

Just do your best, we'll do the rest,

And learn until our brains all rot.' (TPS 95)

Do Hogwarts students learn anything “worth knowing”? Why, the curriculum at Hogwarts was not even intended to teach children anything worth knowing, and that does not bode well for readers who vicariously experience life at Hogwarts.

Harry's primary lesson concerns death, a subject not taught at Hogwarts. However, the one sentence memorized by Harry is the one Dumbledore utters about death: “After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure” (TPS 215, 218). Consider this carefully. An adventure? Is this an invitation to suicide? So we must organize our minds—but this sounds like the advice of a filing clerk! Ah, or is it something else? Look, here Dumbledore speaks of spotting “patterns and links” (TGOF 519). What kind of patterns and links? Alas, my friends, this is a game for which I have no talent.

VII. Comedy and Intelligent Solutions

One method of effecting instant solutions to problems, a method neither magical nor violent, is the method taught for suppressing Boggarts (i.e. class of phenomena that includes any mental aberration, including pop stars like the very serious Humphrey Boggart). According to the *Lupin*, only something *loopy* or comical can defeat a Boggart. To accomplish this one must mentally “force [the Boggart] to assume a shape that [you] find amusing” (*TPOA* 101). Several students succeed at this. Relative to violence and magic, the method seems possessed of psychological depth and a healing potential that physicians and psychologists underestimate. However, the extremely suppressed presence of comedy in Rowling’s work, and the increasingly and overwhelmingly dark atmosphere of her work, is more likely to produce Boggarts than to help liberate children from their fears.

Another problem with Lupin’s solution it assumes the children have an innate ability to instantly produce it, whereas comedy is something so rarefied that it requires years of practice. Thus, when Harry attempts to exorcise his anger by imagining himself “picking up his cauldron, and sprinting to the front of the class, and bringing it down on Snape’s greasy head” (*TGOF* 264), this is not comedy but aggravated assault.

The anger remains, consequently it is Harry's head, not Snape's, that is abused.

Why does Lupin not speak about comedy's potential at deflating and preventing anger, righteous anger included? Because anger animates Harry; without anger the spectacle of violence could not follow. Anger might be the essence or spirit of the conventional hero, the righteous hero, the Old Testament god, and so on.

Fortunately, *HP* has moments of childish comedy and, in the subtext has elements of parody and satire. But comedy is hardly its dominant spirit, and it is generally produced at the expense of others, as when Vernon Dursley has egg on his face and asks, "Do I look stupid?" (*TCOS* 7). *Look* stupid? Never mind egg-faced boy, somehow *everyone* in the series *is* stupid. This raises the question: could a story populated exclusively with intelligent characters be a comedy and, not only a comedy, but could such a story—a story without conflict—even exist?

Perhaps hope is on the horizon, as Rowling might be planning to write a novel about a comedian.

VIII. Conclusion

In the end, we cannot ignore the overwhelming evidence for Harry's mental deficiency and mental disorders. Of course, spellbound fans and optimists may think that I have provided a prejudicial argument because I have not provided much evidence from Harry's later years, those recorded in books 5-7. This is true, but I think the pattern I've established speaks for itself, and I do not wish to bore readers with a marathon parade of evidence.

Beyond the question of psychology, considered as a literary phenomenon, as a point in the evolution of the conventional hero, Harry Potter is significant. In fact, he does not quite belong to the children's literature genre. He is too close to being a superhero and a Greek god like Hercules. His departure from home and his journey through Hogwarts closely resembles the epic adventures of Odysseus. And who can blame adults for entertaining themselves with a little Harry-heroism in an age when authors of serious adult books do not dare create heroes, partly because heroism—conventionally defined—is no longer acceptable? Viewed as a point in the evolution of the conventional hero, Harry Potter represents its last gasp and hurrah.

- CHAPTER TWO -

Popular Culture and Society

i. Introduction

Harry Potter might be a fantasy, but it conserves the essence of our culture and does not help readers experience a fundamentally different culture. Its depiction of an imaginary sporting event (Quidditch) is simply a composite of modern sports, and it lacks imagination insofar as it conserves the value our world ascribes to competition. To argue that Rowling depicts sports and other aspects of culture in the only way they can exist is to forget that other value systems and other cultures do exist. Thus even if sports must exist or must be depicted, they need not be competitive; they can be enjoyed for their own sake; or, if we must compete we might compete for the lowest score, which is to play in jest. Even if such alternatives are humanly impossible, their being impossible cannot prevent an author of fantasy from depicting them. To reiterate my point: Rowling, with regards to ideology, is conservative rather than imaginative. Thus, although fans of the *Harry Potter* series speak highly of the author's imagination, Rowling's breakthrough consists of the

immense degree to which her images are borrowed from modern reality and conserves the dominant ideology.

Stephens suggests a distinction between deep or ideological conservatism and superficial or empirical realism,

Even if the story's events are wholly or partly impossible in reality, narrative sequences and character interrelationships will be shaped according to recognisable forms, and that shaping can itself express ideology in so far as it implies assumptions about human existence. (2)

From this we can infer that *Harry Potter* makes its fantastic world seem realistic or empirically possible because behind its fantastic distortions of the physical world it reproduces our dominant ideology and our all-too-common psychology. This means that because its characters experience ordinary and frankly mundane fears and desires, readers can relate to them and consequently young readers attest to the paradoxical fact that *HP* is essentially a work of realism: "Harry and his friends seem intensely real – parents report a frequent refrain [from their children] of 'they're just like us'" (qtd. from the back cover of *The Prisoner of Azkaban*). Of course, while this is true children do not care for "reality-fiction," and the series would never have succeeded if the potion wasn't sweetened by the fact that Harry is not just "like us" — he

also fulfills our culture's childish and *popular* dreams of fame, money, victories and (magical) power.

II. Class and the Economy

Paralleling modern capitalist and democratic England, Rowling's magical world includes governmental structures, an educational institution largely devoid of humanities, diverse jobs, employee-employer relationships, a monetary system, class divisions, and skill specialization. The government includes temporary officials, voting rituals, and ministries like the "Ministry of Magic". The beliefs implicit in these things include the belief in the need for a representative government, the belief that great disparities in income are justified or necessary or "normal", and the belief that specialization is a good thing. Once more, what this implies is that Rowling's imaginary world does not communicate imaginary values; our modern values are left intact.

Among Rowling's more controversial depictions of the modern world is her depiction of the working class at Hogwarts. Professor Lockhart uses unhappy and "surly-looking dwarfs" (*TCOS* 176) to distribute Valentines; and elves work as personal slaves to magicians, and they prepare all the meals at Hogwarts. Rowling introduces the issue of their 'human'-rights through Hermione's interest in the freedom and welfare of the elves. Rowling does not paint a pretty picture of the man who

abused his elf-servant, Mr Crouch, and that may be evidence of criticism. Furthermore, that the working class is comprised of non-human beings: elves, goblins, and gargoyles, is either the product of the author's comical appropriation of stock fantasy figures, and/or represents her critique of how, in reality, the wealthy treat the poor as sub-humans who must accept their fortunes, or lack thereof. But here as always the critical voice is too weak, which might be expected, given that children's literature may not be the best place to introduce pressing global issues, although that can be disputed, but—this among other examples of the weak critical voice distinguishes the Potter series because it exists, persists, and is continually invoked even as the author continually refuses to amplify it and make global issues major themes.

Elsewhere, the lower class does not fare so well. In an ingenious stroke of irony, Rowling makes the only human adult who properly uses a broom a failed wizard, Filch “the Hogwarts caretaker” (*TPOA* 99). Filch also represents the only human example of the working class in *Harry Potter*. Moreover, in contrast to the pitied non-human workers, Filch is despicable. We learn that he is a failed student of wizardry, as if that were enough to explain his inability to hold a ‘decent’ job. Moreover, his name means ‘to steal,’ he is bad-tempered and he so full of bitterness that “[he] wage[s] a constant war against the students.” Of course, we don't want to idealize the working class, but the kind of irony involved

in the opposing portrayals of the non-human and human working class seems morally dubious and obtuse. In the end, Filch's negative portrayal serves to excuse the economic class division and economic discrimination still prevalent in Britain and, indeed, through the civilized world.

As for the middle-class Dursley family, with the exception of their treatment of Harry, they are a model modern family. Mr and Mrs Dursley, generous to a fault, buy young Dudley every food and form of entertainment he desires. Of course, while this 'generosity' conserves the cultural norm of consumerism and material idolatry, this 'generosity' also functions to make us pity Harry even more, making it an unconscionable manipulation of the young reader's mind.

Ironically, while readers (and Harry) know nothing about the real costs incurred by the Dursleys in raising Harry, we do glimpse a fantastical monetary and economic system in Harry's dreamworld. In *TPS* Hagrid's servant owl demands payment for delivering the newspaper (49). Unfortunately, the newspaper is devoted to problems in the imaginary world, though even these problems are not yet revealed to us, the moment being premature. Nevertheless, the newspaper and the demand for payment upon delivery is one more piece of evidence that the magical world conserves the values of the real world. Of course, it is revolutionary to even consider paying animals for their labor, but the revolutionary or satirical reading is not warranted, and as it stands the

paper-owl's request for payment is at best a cute gimmick—at least, that is how most readers perceive it.

A page later Harry learns that his schooling at Hogwarts will be paid for with the Potter gold reserves stashed for him at Gringotts, a wizard bank. We later learn that Gringotts employs a hundred goblins as bank-tellers, a detail that presumably serves to evoke awe while also comforting readers with the sense of being in a familiar world. The fact that the tellers are goblins cannot even imply the author's disparagement or criticism of the financial industry, not in an age when goblins are stage props in a Disney dominated children's entertainment industry.

Next, consider how Harry acquires his wand. Rather than receiving his wand and robes as a gift earned in the kind of test of courage or wisdom that is commonly required of the fantasy hero, he simply goes to London to purchase all his wizard supplies at the Leaky Cauldron. The question is whether this departure from the literary norm implies a satirical critique or a promotion of consumerism and instant gratification. I dare suggest the latter, largely because no consumer of the Potter series has ever viewed it as a critique of consumerism.

As a rule, Rowling's hints of social criticism are largely too weak to be recognized. Consider what a true literary spelunker might characterize as Harry's uniquely anti-consumerist and anti-capitalistic act: his decision to donate money to the Weasley twins, money intended

to help them start a business that sells joke products like malfunctioning wands and brooms. This is anti-consumerist and anti-capitalistic because the Weasley joke products resemble ‘genuine’ or ‘legitimate’ products that actually are not genuine and legitimate, therefore they are sure to undermine the blind trust upon which economic relations rely. On the other hand, the spirit of Rowling’s satire is so well disguised as children’s literature that, rather than being subversive, it seems mere silliness and tomfoolery.

Thanks to waldemartwatch.com, some of the fiction-reality connections have already been drawn between Voldemort and the evil of consumer-mania. But the anti-Wal-Mart reading has a broader application, even to corporations in general. Modern corporations are legal entities with rights just like *corporeal* humans, but because they don’t actually have bodies they can ‘live’ forever, just like Voldemort. What they need are supporters like the curiously named Death Eaters. They don’t literally eat death; the moniker simply implies a frightening appetite to *consume* anything, even that which will kill them. Voldemort knows how to speak parseltongue, from *parcel*, a word common in Britain and used to mean a package or wrapped item, the kind borne by hundreds of millions of shoppers. Rowling has joked that she derived parseltongue from an old word for “someone with a problem with the mouth, like a hare lip” (accio-quote.org) by which she meant *like Harry*.

iii. Recreational Activities

Hogwartians live like your typical privileged class. They indulge in competitive sports, dances, gambling, violent productions, the consumption of violent spectacles, and lastly, questionable eating habits.

The sport of choice at Hogwarts is Quidditch, a magical brew of English football, rugby, polo, and pheasant hunting. The four houses compete against one another in the intramural playoffs, and magicians from foreign nations compete in the Quidditch World Cup. The latter event, as recorded in *TGOF*, bears immense resemblance to modern major sporting events, and it hardly passes for fantasy literature. The sheer audacity of Rowling's incorporation of modern reality into fantasy literature might itself represent an act of mockery, or a kind of catering to the growing popular appetite for reality shows. The outward form of Quidditch may bear little resemblance to known sports, but the idea of competitive sports remains intact.

Competitive sports are as much a part of capitalistic economies as competitive business practices, and they were long ago incorporated into the British education system. So, they must be and they are a part of life at Hogwarts. In fact, the student population is divided into four 'houses' that compete for points, just as they did in Gothic-style boys

public schools (Brock 141). Rowling develops this borrowed historical custom by requiring the four houses to compete in a combined sports and academic competition that provides Harry with an excellent opportunity to neglect his need to understand the death of his parents, even death itself or—at least—*Voldemort*. Instead of arriving at an understanding of anything, Harry transfers his fears upon *Voldemort*, the stereotypical archenemy, the great Osama bin Laden whose existence justifies the use of more powerful wands and more destructive spells, whose existence excuses Harry from behaving like a gun-slinger when he does square off with ‘the evil one’. No attempt is made to understand the enemy; no attempt is made to avoid conflict and its ‘civilized’ twin, competition. However absurd Quidditch may seem, however great the injuries endured by participants, it never functions as cultural satire and therefore, politically speaking, it too functions to consecrate the ideology of the real world, in this case the culture of competition.

In *TGOF* Harry and his pals participate in the modern English obsession with gambling. The father of Harry’s best friend bets one Galleon on the Irish wizards and his twin sons bet “thirty-seven Galleons, fifteen Sickles, three Knuts [and a fake wand] that Ireland win” (81). Their father, Arthur Weasley, weakly protests that “[t]hey’re a bit young to be gambling”, and “I don’t want you betting ... all your savings.” But, like most authority figures in *Harry Potter*, Arthur has no

authority, and the gambling proceeds in high spirits. The young twins win a small fortune and aspire to invest their money in a business venture I have spoken about above. Needless to say, the episode *glossifies* the whole social ill of gambling, not to mention gambling among children.

Tucker says that “[f]ood [at Hogwarts] is uniformly excellent” and reminiscent of the “feasts described by [children’s fiction] authors like Richmal Crompton and Enid Blyton” (224). This is a stupefying claim. ‘Cuisine’ throughout the series is lamentably devoid of imagination and deserves credit only for excluding references to fast food. Harry’s first “*pig-out*” at *Hogwarts* consists of seven kinds of meat, three types of vegetables, and a list of nine deserts ending with an ellipsis to help us anticipate the innumerable references to sweets that will come in subsequent pages. In *TPOA* we find pumpkin tarts and carrots, but instead of telling us that the students eat them Rowling tells us that this food “melted” and “flew everywhere” (73, 85). As for literary reminiscences, Tucker would have done better to claim that Rowling deliberately ignored C.S. Lewis’ example. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* sweets are associated with evil and death (38), and in *The Last Battle* sugar is associated with evil and stupidity (13). Similarly, sugar is associated with deception in *Animal Farm*. By ignoring such precedents Rowling conserves the uncritical popularity of sweets and the myth of a toothache-free sugar-coated world ... yet not without her

usual nods to the contrary. Consider the horrifying toothless Dementors and those satirical scenes in which the Lupin and the Minister of Magic try to calm and console a traumatized Harry by giving him chocolate (*TPOA* 65, 285). And, of course, there is that profoundly stupid remark made by Harry that “[t]hey saved my life, those cakes” (*TGOF* 54). However, whether we accept such contrasts as evidence of some dietary irony or not, the irony is too weak to echo more than the faintest whisper of conscience.

Considering the popularity of alcohol in England and in the technologically developed non-Muslim world generally, it is not surprising that we also find Rowling’s characters meeting in pubs and partaking of alcohol. In *TCOS* we find Hermione’s parents “leaving the pub” (52), and in *TPOA* (182) and *TGOF* the children consume “Butterbeer.” Butterbeer seems to be a popular non-alcoholic beverage among third and fourth year Hogwarts students approaching the legal drinking age in England. All this seems harmless enough; however, in *TGOF* we find an abused lower-class elf-employee apparently severely intoxicated by the effects of Butterbeer (467). Nevertheless, this seems intended solely for comical effect. Well, butterbeer, ha-ha, of course no one gets drunk on butterbeer ... but plenty of people do get drunk, and thanks to the butterbeer episodes, being drunk seems funnier and less harmful. How so? Well, all advertisers know the law of promoting products by means celebrities and comedy, and while Rowling’s

intention may not have been to promote alcohol consumption among children, her facile and cute butterbeer episode imitates the logic of many modern advertising campaigns.

A scene containing a particularly prolonged, graphic and bizarre display of meaningless violence occurs when Ron's leg is broken. It reads a like scene from a Martin Scorsese movie. The great black dog, Sirius Black, breaks Ron's leg while dragging him into a burrow. Then we find Ron "clutching his leg, which stuck out at a strange angle" (*TPOA* 248); later we find his "white face now tinged with green, both hands clutching his broken leg" (250); and later still "lying on the floor" (252); and then "Ron edged away from both of them, dragging his leg" (254); and in the next chapter "Ron yelled with pain as Black's weight fell on his broken leg" (256). Even if Leacock was right in noting that children "like it rough," I see no reason to assume that what children like is good or bad for them. In this case, the violence, or rather the suffering of others, is prolonged only to conserve the popular morbid fascination with pain.

The broken-leg incident also raises the question of moral ambiguity, for the incident is perpetrated by a *black* dog, possibly Sirius Black, who has a history of shape changing. Black is a largely good character. Might he have had good intentions in breaking Ron's leg? We will never know, and regardless, Black's ambiguity is intentional; after all, his name signifies both light (fire in the original Greek form of

“seirios”) *and* black. But, what does moral ambiguity mean to pre-teen and teenage readers? If the theme was explored in greater detail it might mean something, but presently it remains largely meaningless and inappropriate, as so much in the series is. In fact, the morally ambiguous character is somehow emblematic of the entire *series*; after all, it is a series in which the good conscience is constantly overshadowed by blind faith in popular but harmful values. One might even venture to stereotype the early 21st century mind as one plagued with moral ambiguity and pained escapism. How else can one live in a world where, for example, people believe in the good intentions of their armies but are aware that innocent children will die? How else can one live in a world where the average citizen knows about mounting environmental problems but cannot stop being part of the destructive system? The fact that Sirius Black is never reproached for his actions conserves a value that has existed in all historical cultures: the ability to be immoral without being judged immoral.

Rowling, always ready to defend her work’s originality, also sprinkled her work with secular and pseudo-religious celebrations. In *TPS* *Hollowe’en* is celebrated without masks and costumes; although, upon close inspection, we might conclude that the almost-violent giant troll is Hagrid in costume. This theory, that the incident with the giant troll was a *Hollowe’en* prank orchestrated by the school authorities and Hagrid, explains why Rowling provides no details about how the berserk

troll entered the heavily guarded school; it also explains why, despite fighting Harry and Ron, and despite being captured, there are no details about a punishment. Rowling's deliberate masking of this frightening event could well represent a critique of a culture that needs artificial horror in order to prevent itself from thinking about the real horrors it must bear responsibility for. Then again, it also seems like a piece of mere literary cleverness with little subversive value and a great deal of cultural conservatism.

In *TCOS* Rowling revives an older and now extant form of Holowe'en, the Day of the Dead. She does this by bringing corpses and "dancing skeletons" to the Hogwarts Hollowe'en party. The celebration climaxes when Harry hears a voice threatening to kill him, a voice we may interpret to be the manifestation of a mind that must deal with death, his own as well. Of course, he never does, and so Hollowe'en is conserved as a day of fun and carousing, and its more serious origins are left ignored and forgotten.

Although the custom of celebrating birthdays is rarely linked to social problems, its Me! Me! spirit exemplifies a culture that promotes shallow self-concern and self-interest in the face of a dire need for a higher consciousness. Rowling calls attention to the self-centeredness inherent in birthday celebrations in the opening scene of *TCOS*. In order to evoke pity from readers, Harry's 'normal' expectations for his birthday are dashed to pieces. The boy plunges into self-pity and

without anyone to comfort him, he must suck the proverbial thumb by singing happy birthday to himself (11). While this exhibition of self-pity might resonate with many readers, it is despicable. Harry has shown little pity or even concern for others, and his disgust over the mistreatment of Moody's eye is no exception. Harry's moral flaw should probably be attributed to his essentially a-moral education and his cruel upbringing—both serious cultural problems that deserve the undivided attention of scholars. As for Rowling, whatever the origin of Harry's suffering, she has a responsibility not to exploit it for pity—for such reader responses only inspire readers to excuse whatever injustices Harry commits. Paradoxically, to pity Harry for having to celebrate his birthday alone is to condone his right not to pity *or celebrate* others.

Concerning another kind of birthday, the birthday of Jesus: How does Rowling conserve the yuletide spell on popular culture in a book absurdly accused of promoting witchcraft? *TPOA* conserves Christmas as an occasion for shopping and gift giving. Rowling even dresses the scene (cunningly set in Chapter Twelve) with all the usual secular trappings: a 'Christmas' tree, eggnog, carols (which are not necessarily religious), and decorations. While this kind of literary decorating will do much to give readers a homey feeling, it hardly passes for fantasy. In fact, while it conserves an increasingly morally bankrupt ideology of

consumerism, such cheap and blatant imitations of reality might equally be criticized for being aesthetically or imaginatively bankrupt.

Valentine's Day receives quite a different treatment in *TCOS*. In the first place, it occurs in Chapter Thirteen, not in the numerical equivalent Fourteenth Chapter (I think Valentine's Day is celebrated on the 14th). Secondly, Lockhart suggests celebrating Valentine's Day by forcing dwarves to belittle themselves for the amusement of children. The idea seems both cruel and immoral. Indeed, its spirit mimics the popular perception of dwarves as objects fit only for entertainment and abuse. However, dwarves or no dwarves, Harry has no time for others on this Valentines Day. In fact, he makes no effort to give anyone a valentine, and rather than reading a young girl's silly confession of love for him he turns inwards, decides to face his deep-seated fears, and reads the thoughts of the evil genius, Tom Riddle. On the surface, this implies that the spell of popular culture and its thoughtless customs has been broken, that Harry has finally, of his own accord, escaped from the trap of popular culture begun to think? For fear I might be accused of beating a dead *character* (my apologies to the idiomatic horse), let's give Harry the benefit of the doubt and not inspect this episode too closely.

IV. Technology

In the ‘developed’ world as in *Harry Potter*, technology is ubiquitous and celebrated. Technology makes its first appearance in the Harry’s magical world when Dumbledore uses a very unconventional wizard’s prop—a magic silver cigarette lighter—to illumine Privet Drive. Of course, Dumbledore does not smoke cigarettes; *that* would too flagrant a violation of contemporary values by a good character. Then why the cigarette lighter? Hmmm. Well, let’s not make too much of something so harmless.

Other technological toys may demand closer scrutiny. Consider that Harry’s magical world includes locomotives, buses, automobiles, submarine-ships, flying carriages and magical household appliances. But every machine is transformed so that the real world is reflected back at us in a sugary and sterilized reverse image, backwards, just as the word Desire is reversed in the Mirror of Erised. In other words, the entire *Harry Potter* world is a Mirror of Erised in which readers continually find what they desire. And this wouldn’t matter if the author had not cast her magical haze over forms of technology that contribute to global warming, warfare, tens of millions of traffic deaths and injuries, electrocutions and innumerable slices of burnt toast. Therefore, to turn such examples of technology into ‘neat’ stuff ready for kiddy consumption is a highly suspect endeavor.

Harry has an extraordinary broom, but also the Maurader’s Map, the Pocket Sneakoscope, the Invisibility Cloak and his magical wand.

Some of Harry's traditional magical props, like the broom, have names suggestive of modern high-tech products. Like high-tech products with built-in obsolescence, some of Harry's gadgets are regularly upgraded. In fact, in Harry's world, flying brooms are available in a variety of styles and models, each bearing names reminiscent of such modern consumer appliances as vacuum cleaners and less innocuous products. There is the Nimbus Two Thousand, the Cleansweep Seven, and the butt-scorching Firebolt. Of course, it's all very cute to see the consumerist world reflected back at us in such a palatable fashion, and yet surely imagination can soar somewhat above the local shopping mall and surely conscience can refrain from turning the theme of consumerism—that is *the destruction of the Earth*—into a cookie!

At Hogwarts, paintings are not works of art studied for their meanings or appreciated for the aesthetic properties; paintings are gadgets that have a primarily physical function, like doors or portals to other places. In some cases, the people represented in Hogwarts paintings actually speak, as if paintings were Hogwartian equivalents of high-definition plasma television screens whose sole function is to trick the eye and amaze the mind. This obsession with surface reality and our failure to think may explain why Harry made no connection between a) the disembodied voice that said “rip, tear, kill,” b) the pictures supposedly *ripped* by Sirius Black, who transformed into a dog, and c) Harry's aunt's dog, “Ripper” (*TPOA* 27). What such and other

word association or word connection games mean remains a riddle to me, and likely even more to readers who are quite content to surf on the ocean of maya.

At Hogwarts, students tell paintings to give them access to secret rooms, and they get access if they have the correct password. This simple command-response interaction is borrowed from high-tech home security systems and anticipates a future of voice-activated domestic appliances and robots. While such magical, anthropocentric control over the environment may be available to the rich plunderers of the Earth, who—whatever their intentions—are causing poor countries to sink into debt and starvation ... all this aside, any fiction that shows children interacting with art in the way above-described grossly misrepresents the ideal and supports an unthinking culture of conditioned command and obey responses.

Some Hogwarts paintings function as babysitters who prevent students from playing hooky, that is, from escaping the corridors of useless education. Babysitting is not necessarily bad. However, at Hogwarts the babysitting service prevents Harry from confronting his fears, fears that virtually no school on Earth even attempts to resolve. And Hogwarts is no exception. Nor is *Harry Potter*. What I mean is this: books should be vehicles that either instruct readers about human nature or produce neither desire nor determination but intelligence free of irrational fears and unsustainable desires. I doubt the *Potter* series

meets this standard for books, and suspect it is instead a stifling baby sitter that—no less than a television—prevents the development of enlightenment and indoctrinates and encourages a passive mental existence.

In *TCOS* Harry sends an email-like message in Tom Riddle's diary, and Tom, though not present, responds, which is pretty cool. Even cooler is how, in this same diary, the page for June 13th "seemed to have turned into a minuscule television screen" (180). Wow! Yes, but why the 13th? Is the author borrowing imbibing the episode with the irrational fear associated with this number, and therefore perpetuating the irrational fear, or what? Why associate bad luck with a television screen? Correct me if I'm wrong, but whatever the author meant, it is far too obscure for young readers who are, consequently, doomed to experience the *Potter* series as if it were a television show, as an unrelenting stream of words that produce images as effortlessly as a television, and prevents enlightenment with equal efficacy.

In Harry acquires the Maurader's Map (*TPOA*). The said map shows the school's inhabitants in real time and emits word bubbles when displayed persons speak. The Maurader's Map seems eerily akin to military GPS/infra red enemy tracking gadgets. That Rowling has made such devices appear neat is frightening for anyone concerned about how the world's technocrats monitor the habits and movements of citizens, consumers, suspects and enemies. Any appropriating such

technology for the production of children's fiction smells of creative and moral bankruptcy.

A powerful exception to Rowling's method of operation occurs when Hagrid gives Harry a book "full of wizard photographs. Smiling and waving at him from every page were his mother and father" (*TPS* 220). In a very bitter-sweet way, the illusion provided by this simulacrum of high-tech digital gadgetry is undermined by Harry's parents waving in every picture. They might be waving to say Hello, but because they are illusions and inaccessible to Harry, their waving is bound to imply departure and separation. Does this mean that the photographer's power to make people live in the past has not been sweetened? The constant waving motion should or could have told Harry that it was time to let go of his parents, but he didn't take the hint. And so, Harry's obsession with his biological parents continues to separate him from his step-parents, from the larger world he must learn to live with, and from the larger questions he must answer, questions like: Why did you—Harry, in dwelling on the photo album, effectively ignore Dumbledore's warning not to dwell on images of desire (seen in the Mirror of Erised) (*TPS* 157)? And, why did Rowling put this profoundly philosophical warning in the mouth of *Dumbledore*? Perhaps because, despite being philosophical, it is as useless as the words of the doctor who told the hypochondriac "You must stop thinking you're sick!"

V. Society

According to reports, when a young man asked if Dumbledore would find “true love,” Rowling obliquely answered that Dumbledore is gay. The conservative tint of her reply is open to debate, but her portrayals of race, gender, sexuality, family, stepparents, overweight people and other social markers of identity are conservative and mainstream.

Consider gender roles. Mr Weasley and Mr Dursley are breadwinners married to housewives. At Hogwarts, men occupy the highest seats of power. The leading male and female characters, Harry and Hermione, fall into the typical pop culture gender roles, one being the physically active male the other the relatively passive yet brainier female, Hermione. Why do her characters have to conform to such boring stereotypes? Being politically liberal isn’t even a necessary precondition for deviations from gender norms in fiction; the only necessary condition is *creativity*.

The wicked and despised Dursley household and the good but mentally challenged Weasley household are old-fashioned families with working fathers, housewives and one or more children. Such families are increasingly hard to find in the developed world, and may well become extinct, so why did they—the fathers especially—receive negative portrayals? Considered dramatically, their negative portrayals

ensure that Harry has no reason to feel jealous or lucky, for if he did, we might stop pitying him. Considered autobiographically, their negative portrayals reflect the author's family history. The negativity of these otherwise conservative portrayals represent a strategic violation of Rowling's conservative pattern; they are strategic primarily (I think) for the dramatic reason. But, since the nuclear family unit is still the standard family unit, so the question must be asked: Why has a fantasy writer conserved the social norm? Well, consider her frightful options. What if Harry had been raised by two lesbians or by a monkey and seven little green men? Alas, any author bold enough to tinker with the traditional family structure risks provoking a deafening social outcry, so why bother? Who has the stomach to care so much about challenging the limits of fiction?

Women holding professional jobs are also a minority in Rowling's magical world. When critics pointed this out she promised this problem would be corrected in later books, but as is true of similar dismissals of somewhat irrelevant criticism, the 'problem' never was corrected. – who replaced Dumbledore? --- To have 'corrected' it would have violated her consistently applied conservative principle. Anyway, the diverse history of mankind sufficiently demonstrates that no race or gender has some special talent for leading or corrupting, and what's needed is not for fiction to precede reality but for human beings to become ... well, human.

In her essay, “What is Authority?” Hannah Arendt noted that the loss of faith in higher authority has even spread to pre-political areas, so that “[the] authority which ruled the relations between adults and children, teachers and pupils, is no longer secure” (92). Of course, we are right to have lost faith in higher authority, as it was founded on money, might and empty assertions. One result of the fall of authority is that Western teachers are losing the right to exert authority through corporeal punishment, which explains why it isn’t present in *Harry Potter*. Another consequence of the fall of authority is that the teachers at Hogwarts are all either ridiculous or evil, and Harry has no greater authority than himself. Harry breaks school rules even as he continues to obey the requirement to study and be a good student.

One noteworthy benefit of Rowling’s social realism is that most of her authority figures are full of common weaknesses. Ironically, with the exception of Dumbledore, perhaps none are idealized and adorable. But even Dumbledore’s actions and words seem to reflect the popular secular belief that children are capable of learning their own lessons if they are left to their own devices, which reiterates a popular modern idea about raising children, that they learn much better if they are allowed to follow their own, *natural* paths. This is, I warrant, a most convenient idea in a world where parents are too busy to raise children, and education specialists process children in education factories that are not so different from Hogwarts. Indeed, Hogwarts is an institution,

not a surrogate home. It is largely devoid of any real signs of affection between adults and children and between children and children, it is a place where adults cannot even “touch” children for fear of something, it is a place where irrational fears and hopes are encouraged, and where education consists of memorizing spells and names. In truth, it’s a nightmare, not a fantasy to be hungrily consumed like ... like a chocolate sprinkled ice cream!

Thanks to various reforms and revolutions, the English aristocratic class system is increasingly overshadowed by the economic class system. Bluebloods and royalty are falling into disfavour, a fact echoed by Rowling’s villain *Lord* Voldemort, *Lord* being a title signifying aristocratic rank. Building on the blueblood theme, Voldemort needs blood to live, and will even imbibe that of the bourgeois, Muggle-born blood of Harry Potter. That the hero’s blood is necessary to him and superior to his own is a nice pro-bourgeois gesture that is lost on most readers but certainly echoes the popular British sentiment.

Christopher Hitchens has noted that the lightning-shaped scar on Harry’s forehead is a curious piece of social-marking once used by a now defunct group of British Nazi sympathizers (The New York Times).

Social realism is one thing, but do we need to propagate the childish habit of name-calling and schoolyard stereotyping? According to Tucker, “In these stories, to look bad is to be bad” (225). Thus, the nasty Slitherfins, rather than being slender, appear to be fat, large, and

awkward. And Harry, despite never being called handsome, falls prey to this moronic delusion when he tells the evil Tom Riddle, “You’re ugly, you’re foul!” (*TCOS* 233).

The Stone Age Dursleys aren’t much wiser than Harry. Like many of Rowling’s reactionary critics, they are terrified of witchcraft and wizardry. Mr Vernon Dursley actually disapproves of imagination (*TPS* 10). How ironic, considering what passes for imagination nowadays. Of course, Rowling never indicates that the Dursley’s fear of witchcraft has a religious origin, and religion is not something to be mocked or tampered with by fantasy writers, lest they lose too many flat-footed readers.

VII. Conclusion

The intensity with which reality contaminates Harry Potter’s fantasy world starkly differentiates his fantasy world from the fantasy worlds found in the works of Tolkien, Le Guin, Lewis, and others. Why is that? What the author’s intentions were in producing such contamination? If it was meant to raise questions and to make readers think, the author failed miserably in her intent.

“*Don’t ask questions* – that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys” (*TPS* 20). Ironically, this rule is also the rule with most of Rowling’s readers, and Rowling might even have written it with an ironic

grin. Who knows? Maybe *Harry Potter* is something far more adult and cunning than it pretends to be. Well, who knows? Who? We have to ask, don't we?

- CHAPTER THREE -

Nature and Technology

I. Introduction

To understand how unique Rowling's vision is in the context of children's fiction, one need only compare it to modern classics and note, for example, that in contrast, Tolkien's fantasy world is devoid of 20th century paraphernalia and souvenirs. Plus, in Tolkien's work the forces of darkness employ medieval kinds of machines and technology, while in Rowling's world everyone uses **it**. Kenneth Grahame provided a dystopian vision of technology, as has George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, *The Heart of Darkness* and "Cock-A-Doodle-Do" and possibly *The Bible*. Why does Rowling appear to side with the world rather than with writers? But wait, let me first present the evidence of her anti-environmental bias, then present evidence of exceptions to the pattern, before I hazard a few conclusions about the author's motives and the text's meaning for young readers.

II. Technology and Nature Generally

Deep differences and superficial similarities between Lewis' *Narnia* and Rowling's *HP* abound. The topic of technology offers an excellent example. Examples of technology are rare in *Narnia*, moreover, Lewis informs us that *the* train accident was real and that it is responsible for the death of the entire Pevensie family. Rowling inverts this example. *HP* abounds in images of technology; and, except in association with Dudley, she typically presents technology as harmless, necessary, or fun. In fact, motorbikes fall from the sky without harming their riders; magical locomotives transport students to Hogwarts and to its pristine Forbidden Forest; Harry rides a bus moving at speeds that would surely kill its occupants; and Harry and Ron, though under-aged, *fly* an automobile, crash into the Whomping Willow, and emerge unscathed and unconcerned.

The case of the Whomping Willow and the flying appliance is typical of Rowling's representations of Nature and technology. This very languid tree "was a very violent tree" (*TPOA* 136) that moves and guards a scary secret entrance to Hogwarts, an entrance used by the werewolf Lupin! Apparently, the Whomping Willow intentionally obstructed the movement of the flying automobile in order to prevent the boys from discovering a trapdoor and prevent them from solving and stopping the murders at Hogwarts. This bad, oh-so bad tree, rather than being a romantic symbol of grief, like its namesake the weeping willow, seems instead to be the cause of grief, and that's funny, right? While I wholly

support creative licence, this is a case of a repressed licence, a licence that only permits negative representations of Nature and this is not likely to promote a sustainable relationship any more than the camper's love affair with Nature, a love affair that is quickly mocked by the disastrous Dursleys-go-camping episode in *TPS*.

Rowling contrasts her intentionally rosy depictions of technology with depictions of Nature that are, with few exceptions, forbidding, dark, and worrisome. In his third year at Hogwarts "Harry had had enough unpleasant experiences in [the Forbidden Forest] to last him a lifetime" (*TPA* 86). But as the series progresses, the Forbidden Forest continues to live up to its slanderous name, a name that, with no counterpart, can only reinforce a medieval mindset about the evils lurking in forests.

Spiders are common objects of irrational fear, so in *HP* they are portrayed as a definite danger to human life. Aragog, supreme spider leader, cannot restrain his mob's lust to devour Harry and Ron (Ch. 15, *TCOS*). Luckily the boys are saved by the flying Ford Anglia "thundering down the slope, headlamps glaring, its horn screeching, knocking spiders aside" (207). Ugh! What nonsense! The scene tells us more about the effects of pop culture and education on the minds of our children than it does about Nature. I would laugh at its absurdity if doing so didn't mean ignoring the reality that automobiles are a far more common source of death than spiders.

Moving on, after the flying car crash, Harry, Ron, and Hermione pass through the trapdoor and land on some “sort of plant thing” (TPS 201). Like the Whomping Willow, this plant thing is no friendly plant. “[T]he plant had started to twist *snakelike* tendrils around her ankles” and tries to suffocate her and her friends (203; italics mine). Afterwards, Harry hunts birdlike creatures. Harry assures us that “[t]hey’re not birds,” and perhaps that’s true, but we can hardly think that these flying and winged creatures are not alive. When Harry “pinned [one] against the stone” and causes “a nasty crunching noise” (TPS 204) we might rightfully suspect that this painful detail was meant to remind us that Harry has no feelings for other living things.

But this paranoid anthropocentric stereotyping of non-human Nature also extends into the human world. There are evil and dangerous human beings in *Harry Potter*, but even those evil human beings are typically ugly, and are often ugly insofar as they resemble animals. Voldemort, the most evil ‘person,’ says of himself, “I am much, much more than a man” (TGOF 19) and he has a “snake-like face” (573). The ugly Moody seems to delight in causing pain and anxiety, but again, with his magical eye, one leg, and deformed face, he hardly seems human. The Hungarian Veela use their beauty for evil, but they too are said to be more than human (TGOF 101). Why more than human rather than less? Perhaps only to mock conventional estimations of what it means to be evil.

In Chapter Three of *TPS* Vernon Dursley, who is no Nature lover, is so disturbed by the flood of letters sent to Harry that he takes Harry and his family out of their comfortable suburban home and into a remote wilderness, apparently with the intent to abandon Harry like Hansel and Gretel and Ishmael before them. “[I]cy sea spray and rain crept down their necks and a chilly wind whipped their faces” (37). The family takes an old rowing boat to the “what looked like a large rock way out to sea” and they settle in a hut with a moth-eaten sofa, reinforcing the negative representation of Nature. Could Rowling possibly provide a less polarized view of Nature and technology?

Hagrid’s garden and pumpkin patch seem friendly enough. Unfortunately, this traditional food source is destined to be wasted on Hallowe’en (*TCOS* 100). Two years later its pumpkins are intended for a class gold-hunting lesson (*TGOF* 471-72). The pumpkins are never associated with food because vegetables hardly exist on the Hogwarts menu, and when they are they are rarely eaten. Why? Surely a good author could make eating a vegetable as funny as sitting in one so large you can sit in it for a day before tossing it in the garbage (*TCOS* 100).

A rare instance of a connection between Nature and the human need for food occurs when “Ron’s eyes strayed to the pile of chocolate frogs waiting to be unwrapped” and when “Ron was more interested in eating the [chocolate] frogs” (*TPS* 77,78). This example of the cocoaification of Nature is now common in First World countries where Nature is served

to its 'lovers' in the form of chocolate bunnies, manicured lawns and the modern myth of natural beauty. As for the sterile chocolate Easter Bunny, a good old-fashioned rabbit stew would do less damage to the environment.

A similar theme marks Rowling's "Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans" (*TPS* 78). These jelly-bean rip-offs come in all assorted flavours, including vegetable flavours. Ron bites into a sprout-flavoured 'bean' and expresses his disgust. In reality a sprout could be one of the healthiest foods eaten in *HP*, but in all likelihood even a sprout-flavoured bean would provide none of the roughage and nutrients that the unprocessed vegetable could provide. What kind of example is Rowling setting for our children? In a world already littered with sugar, salt, fat and meat products, my fatherly talent for persuasion is already humbled; I do not need Rowling's anti-vegetable gags to make matters worse.

The pattern of representing Nature, at least raw Nature, as something inedible, nicely conserves technological man's relationship to the Earth, enabling him to live, in the words of Jacques Ellul, "[e]nclosed within his artificial creation" (*The Technological Society* 428).

The Hogwarts grounds include a vegetable patch and greenhouses (*TCOS* 70). The vegetables are never described. The greenhouses only contain "interesting and dangerous plants" (71). By 'interesting' Rowling seems to mean showy things like the "umbrella-sized flowers," "Venemous Tentacula" (73), a choking plant, and the dangerous

Mandrake that serves as an antidote to magic. The occult associated the vegetable world with poisons, and this view partly survived in the Jewish myth of the forbidden fruit, and it still survives in an age where greed has made expensive unnatural medicines more available than cheap and easily reproduced natural medicines. Rowling's narrative supports this tradition by consistently providing negative representations of the plant world.

The Weasley garden, despite being owned by wizards, reflects a typically useless and purely aesthetic suburban garden. "[T]here were plenty of weeds ..., gnarled trees all around the walls, plants Harry had never seen spilling from every flowerbed and a big green pond full of frogs" (*TCOS* 32). Some peonies are mentioned, no vegetables. In other words, this garden functions to provide organic decorations. As such, the garden might still have some value if the children appreciated the flowers, but perhaps boy wizards should not venture into territory forbidden to the masculine gender.

Rodents are pests, and as pests they have no higher function than to be flung to their death. I refer to the gnome-like pests that Harry, Ron and the twins expel from the Weasley garden. The rodent-like creatures symbolize the natural food source of the weasel-like Weasleys. However, the Weasley boys, rather than eating the gnome-like pests, capture and hurl them: "[Ron] raised the gnome above his head ... and started to swing it in great circles like a lasso ... it flew twenty feet into the air and

landed with a thud” (*TCOS* 33). Ron assures Harry that this does not hurt the gnomes, but I’m not convinced, and must sadly draw the usual depressing conclusions. Even the ironic use of the Weasley name, while hinting at the author’s transcendental consciousness of the stupidity she depicts, fails to redeem the work as a work of responsible children’s literature.

The anti-environmental pattern continues when Ron expresses his bourgeois and instrumentalist relationship to the Earth after his pet rat disappears. Ron coldly says of his vanished rat, “And he was a bit useless.” Then, without grieving or reflecting on precisely why his rat was useless to him, he expresses his hope for a new pet, “You never know, Mum and Dad might get me an owl now” (*TPOA* 215). That Ron does not grieve his rat’s disappearance is strange because he previously expressed much anger at the mere thought its loss. Ron does not seem capable of dealing with the loss, and finds refuge in the consumerist philosophy that everything is disposable and replaceable, a philosophy that may not mean much until it is applied to oneself.

Rowling’s employment of owls to carry mail is based on the historical use of carrier pigeons. While this historical precedent is environmentally suspect in and of itself, the use of owls is more troublesome. In fact, the snowy owl has become extinct in Britain since 1975, and four other species of owl are on the BoCC3 list (www.britishbirds.co.uk).

Although domesticated animals seem to receive friendlier treatment, consider the wisdom of Dumbledore's "*faithful* pets," and consider that pets *HP* are never faithful, never quite *dumbesticated*. Not only does Ron's rat leave him without warning, but "Cat, Rat, and Dog" (*TPOA*) raises very serious questions about the loyalty of Hermione's pet cat and about man's so-called best friend. The first five letters of Hermione's cat *Crookshanks* is sufficient warning about its allegiance. Concerning the great dog, namely Sirius Black, the semantic connection between this surname and Voldemort's title '*Dark Lord*' should raise enough questions about Black's loyalty to Harry. In short, even domestic animals do not present morally unambiguous figures. While this moral ambiguity also exists in books by Tolkien and Lewis, in their work this is a product of the Fall and is meant to be rectified in the new Heaven and the new Earth. Rowling offers no such religio-eschatological vision, and hardly needs to, as most readers ignore the 'evils' present in the series.

Even the human animal is misrepresented, or rather, not fully represented. Consider the subject of sexuality, a subject largely invisible in the series. While this self-imposed censorship agrees with the conservative convention in children's literature, Rowling couldn't resist a few sly jokes. Thus, when Ron fears Hermione's cat will eat his rat, Hermione informs him that "[a]ll cats chase rats, Ron!" (*TPOA* 111). Other allusions to sexuality include scenes in which animals are born from Ron's mouth, hair appears on Hermione's face, pimples appear on her

hands, and that special a scene in which, thanks to a nasty spell, Harry walks with a boneless appendage.

Death is the ultimate part of Nature, and it, too, is represented in the manner that best conserves popular sentiment, a sentiment that is not quite religious and certainly not atheistic. Thus, in *TDH* Harry kind of resurrects.

III. Animal Abuse

Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, apparently knows nothing about the shy nature of owls or about their nocturnal ways and nesting habits. He keeps his mail-owl in a “pocket inside his overcoat” (*TPS* 43). While visiting the Dursleys he decides to send his owl on an errand, and instead of gently releasing the owl and instead of waiting for clear skies he “threw the owl into the storm” (43). In Lewis’ series, animals are also abused, but *by the evil powers*, as when the Witch’s dwarf whips the reindeer (*The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*, 108). Rowling’s uncritical identification of environmentally ignorant behaviour with Hagrid either reflects a culturally conservative philosophy or challenges the reader to question Hagrid’s morality.

“Hedwig was shut safely in her cage,” writes Rowling of Harry’s owl (*TPS* 68). She does not say why Hedwig is safer in a cage than not in a

cage. In all likelihood the cage serves only to protect the environmentally ignorant Harry from losing his owl. Certainly there is no evidence that Harry ever wondered if “a wild animal imprisoned in a small cage [...] removed from its habitat and forced to conform to the impositions of our demands, [can] ever be considered ‘happy?’” (Suzuki 682) And besides owls, dragons are equally mistreated. To satisfy the human appetite for gladiator-like entertainment dragons are restrained with “chains connected to heavy leather straps around their necks and legs” (*TGOF* 286).

In *TPOA* an owl has worked itself to the point of unconsciousness by carrying a large package for Harry (11). Harry responds by carrying the owl to Hedwig’s cage, that it may drink water. The Weasley owl Errol must fly mail from the Weasley household in England to Hogwarts and probably to Egypt and to wherever else the other sons work, which probably explains why Errol finally falls unconscious into a jug of milk. Hermione assures Ron that Errol is still alive, but Ron says he wasn’t concerned about Errol, no, what troubled him was the letter delivered by Errol (*TCOS* 68). Neither Harry nor Ron experience a twinge of conscience for working owls to near-death.

In *TGOF* Moody teaches his class three powerful curses: the Imperius curse gives the magician power over other creatures; the Cruciatus curse gives the magician the power to inflict extraordinary pain on other creatures; the Avada Kedavra curse gives the magician the power to kill

other creatures. Moody demonstrates each curse on a spider and says to his students, “You’d like it, would you, if I did it to you?” (188). If we infer from this that Moody understands that his lesson is morally reprehensible, we might be mistaken. In fact, Moody is not beyond torturing any human being whom he suspects of evil, although he prefers to quiet his conscience somewhat by turning them into animals first. Thus, when he catches Malfoy fighting with Harry, he turns Malfoy into a ferret and causes him to fly through the air, then fall “smack to the floor, and then bounce upwards ... squealing in pain” (*TGOF* 181). When Professor McGonagall inquires, Moody responds that he is teaching a lesson. This typical defense of corporeal punishment outrages McGonagall, but Ron cherishes Malfoy’s pain and Hermione and Harry laugh about it. Afterwards, Hermione alone feels concern for the abused young Malfoy. That Harry Potter’s fans have not protested against this is lamentable, and may reveal an old stereotype about what it means to be male.

Professor Flitwick teaches his students to “make a pineapple dance across a desk [and] turn a mouse into a snuff-box” (*TPS* 190). Such is the lowest form of magic; mere circus sensationalism that glosses over the misuse and waste of life which it entails, waste cunningly hinted at by the first half the compound word, *snuff*, as in *to snuff out*. Of course, ha-ha, it was a magic act and can be reversed, but it was not, and the lesson resembles certain feats of engineering such as the transformation

of forests into toilet paper. On the other hand, Flitwick's frivolous magic demonstration does seem to fall into Lewis' second of two categories of magic, the good sort of magic ("On Three Ways of Writing for Children" 236). Kidding. As frivolous and silly as Flitwick's demonstration may seem, it actually conserves our dominant culture's destructive relationship to Nature.

Rowling's conservation of modern science's right to experiment on animals continues in other Hogwarts classroom scenes. Hermione's magical transfiguration act creates a "tortoise [that] looked more like a turtle" (*TPOA* 233). More amusingly, I mean more disturbingly, a single guinea-fowl is transformed into several guinea-pigs, but "Neville's guinea-pig still had feathers" (*TGOF* 336). Earlier, Neville is "made to disembowel a barrel-ful of horned toads" (185) simply because Snape needed to punish Neville. Animals are routinely vivisected, desiccated, and their bodies or parts stored or hung from ceilings. Rowling never even suggests that these natural resources are being conserved and that the magicians do not waste what they kill in their scary, Nazi-like, corporate-like world.

The veneer of comedy can help readers swallow just about anything, as when Hagrid tries to satisfy the monstrous appetite of his newborn baby Norwegian Ridgeback dragon by feeding it "rats by the crate" (*TPS* 173). Beyond the issue of packaging animals in crates, the dragon's origin raises the issue of importing potentially aggressive and invasive species. Rachel Carson notes that "nearly half of the 180 or so major

insect enemies of plants in the United States are accidental imports from abroad [and are] our most troublesome insects” (195). Yes, I keep telling myself that we are discussing fantasy, not reality, but I consider it suspect that so many real modern ‘sins’ are replicated in Rowling’s works, often without any hint of conscience or consequence, as if her entire aim were to help desensitize children to the atrocities committed by the real world.

The sanctity of birth, or at least of childrearing, is also violated. The first task of the wizard champions is to “*collect the golden egg*” from a dragon (*TGOF* 305). ‘Collect’ is surely a euphemism when used to describe the act of stealing eggs from nesting mothers (288), but it reflects Harry’s insulated conscience and consistent indifference towards the cruelty he participates in. Harry even foolishly remarks that his dragon is “*too protective of her eggs*” (310; italics mine). Pardon? Was the author trying to be *funny*? And Hagrid, despite being keeper of magical creatures, is no better. When he wins a dragon egg from a fellow boozier in a game of cards he does not wonder about the ethical implications of possessing the unborn offspring of a parent who, in all likelihood, did not consent to her loss.

IV. Environmentally Deprecating Language

Leaving our deplorable inventory of environmentally ignorant scenes behind, we can begin collecting evidence of environmentally deprecating language.

An all-too-common example environmentally deprecating language is the following description of young Dudley: “[H]is piggy little eyes fixed on the [television] screen and his five chins wobbling as he ate continuously” (*TPOA* 18). In *TPS* Hagrid loses his temper with Uncle Vernon and attempts to turn him into a pig. He only succeeds in putting a pig’s tail on Vernon. He then comments that he “[m]eant ter turn him into a pig, but I suppose he was so much like a pig anyway there wasn’t much left ter do” (48). The ‘narrator’ associates the Dudleys with pigs because the pig stereotype assumes a gluttonous nature. But this stereotype is not based on reality. Pigs, like most creatures, will only eat too much or too often if held captive and overfed. The stereotype reflects society’s ignorance of animals and implies a lack of compassion for the obese Dudley.

Though we are all familiar with the stereotypical image of the pig, and although pigs have as yet no voice to defend them, these are not valid excuses for perpetuating an unjust stereotype. Pigs might spend more time eating than the average human being, but that does not make them gluttons. To be a glutton one must act in ignorance of one’s proper nature, and because animals typically do this far less often than

human beings, animals are really, in essence rather than in specifics, examples to be imitated.

A similar misunderstanding of Nature is evident in Sirius Black's response to Peter Pettigrew's attempt to defend himself by telling Ron that "I was your rat" (274). Black says, "[i]f you made a better rat than human, it's not much to boast about, Peter." This sounds agreeable enough, but any suggestion that human beings should be better than rats is anthropocentric vanity. Human beings might be higher in the food chain, but only ignorance of human history could inspire Black's narcissistic opinion. Moreover, if we're going to judge humans better than rats, let us also compare worms and fleas, oranges and petunias, and all the parts of life that cannot be comparatively 'graded'.

Another meaningless and ignorant comparison occurs when Ron calls Professor Trelawney an "ugly old bat" (*TGOF* 325). Pansy Parkinson screams, "*Stunningly pretty? Her? ... What was she judging against – a chipmunk?*" (*TGOF* 277). Imagine telling a woman that she looks beautiful in relation to a man: not only would it be cruel but it ignores the fact that between men and women, as between humans and chipmunks, different aesthetic standards apply.

"Uncle Vernon made another funny noise, like a mouse being trodden on" (*TPS* 40). Combining incongruous images like a mouse and a large uncle can be humorous, but not every instance of incongruity is

humorous, and this is one. Indeed, I fail to see how the thought of a mouse being crushed can ever be comical. That distinct possibility that the author thought otherwise is a deeply disturbing one.

Uncle Vernon accuses Hagrid of trespassing, and Hagrid, unable to deny this, calls Uncle Vernon a “great prune” (*TPS* 40). Rather than come to the defense of prunes I suggest Hagrid has spoken in slang, making this a case of the pot calling the kettle black. In fact, readers ought to sympathize with Vernon, who really had good intentions in protecting Harry from the supernatural. And how would you feel if a giant busted through your door with his bare hands?

But Uncle Vernon is painted with the brush as every other character. He compares insane people to dogs, saying they are barking and howling mad (68). Later, the narrator compares the angry verbal response of Hermione to the hissing of an angry goose (116). When the centaur Bane sees his companion carrying Harry on his back he says in disgust, “Are you a common mule?” (187). Rowling uses common bovine and canine stereotypes to deprecate another character. The horrible Aunt Marge is beefy (*TPOA* 22). She has also acquired some of her pet dogs’ characteristics, for we read that she barked and growled (23). The above insults might be conventional; they are not for that reason justified or intelligent. Why should Nature imagery be used exclusively to coin insults? Jesus called Herod “that fox” and warned against ‘wolves,’ but he validated this language by himself becoming the lamb.

Not surprisingly, metaphors and similes of animals are used to describe Lord Voldemort. His hands are like “large, pale spiders” and his pupils are “like a cat’s” (*TGOF* 559). Authors who use animal stereotypes in this environmentally deprecating manner conserves and perpetuate the habit of using Nature to describe bad characters.

Another trope of environmentally deprecating images comprises Rowling’s names for certain characters. One of Harry’s enemies is ‘Crabbe,’ a name evoking a crab-like image. The morally ambiguous Snape has a name resembling *snake*. The hero’s team is named after a pagan supernatural creature, the griffin; in contrast, Harry’s enemies belong to the house of ‘Slytherin,’ and the snake stereotype is shamelessly exploited in *TCOS*, where a snake is provoked to anger by Lockhart and prepares to strike (145).

The snake is also the foremost exception to the rule of environmentally deprecating language. Just as Lockhart is about to be bitten, Harry subdues it using parseltongue, and witnesses fear he will “sprout fangs or spit poison” (157), suggesting the hero has become snakelike. In fact, the hero *is* snakelike. He has qualities that make him a good candidate for the Slytherin team (*TCOS* 245) and his snakelike nature is the best explanation for why he expressed sympathy for the snake in the zoo (*TPS* 23).

The culturally conservative stereotyping of the snake continues in the following:

*Of the many fearsome beasts and monsters that roam our land,
there is none more curious or more deadly than the Basilisk,
known also as the King of Serpents ... aside from its deadly and
venomous fangs, the Basilisk has a murderous stare, and all
who are fixed with the beam of its eye shall suffer instant death.*
(TCOS 215)

This monstrous snake will flee “*only from the crowing of the rooster*” (215). Similarly, in the Bible the crowing of the rooster follows Peter’s loss of faith and causes him to flee from Jesus, who was symbolized by a rooster, a noisy bird that, thanks to its habit of waking people up, is readily associated with resurrection.

We might credit Rowling for challenging her readers by associating her hero with a negative animal stereotype, but—and not surprisingly—the point seems utterly lost on her young readers. Of course, she must have foreseen this, and since she has made no effort to cure the Pottermania epidemic, one can only speculate about the motivation behind the literary subtleties, ambiguities and violations of good sense.

V. Exceptions to the Anti-Environmental Trend

Harry is more a clown than an environmental hero. While he shows little pity for humans, he does for a dead domestic cat, for whom he stupidly suggests, “Shouldn’t we try and help –” (*TCOS* 106).

Ironically, or bizarrely, a giant squid is misrepresented as a friendly bread-eating beast. The Weasley twins tickle the giant squid, the squid saves Colin and it eats Harry’s toast instead of Harry. I suspect that the squid, being a relatively un-stereotyped animal, being besides armed with ink and connected to comedy (the twins and tickling), and being a secretive beast, symbolises the author, Joanne Rowlings, who apparently considers herself a harmless creature.

The Mandrake is either the only plant to receive a positive role in the first four books of *HP*, or its role exemplifies the subtle currents of the series. Mandrake is used as an antidote to sorcery and supernaturalism, making it a likely symbol for Nature or intelligence. But the name ‘Mandrake’ also hints at a connection to the evil Malfoy, whose first name is Draco. Does this mean that Rowling associated the forces of ‘evil’ with pro-environmentalism? This would explain why green is associated with Voldemort and the Slytherins, right? Perhaps. But, assuming I am not dreaming all this up, what on Earth was Rowling thinking when she inscribed these subtleties into children’s fiction?

In the middle of her projected middle book, in the chapter titled “The House-Elf Liberation Front,” the narrator proposes that perhaps the

dragon-like Skrewts “did not appreciate being forced into pillow-lined boxes and nailed in” (*TGOF* 321). This rare evidence of an environmental-conscience occurs in a chapter whose title contains the word ‘Elf’ and the initials of this same chapter contain the letters ELF. Coincidence? Consider that ELF is the acronym for the environmentally active Earth Liberation Front, and that this organisation was founded in Britain, Rowling’s own land of citizenship.

Love and compassion are actually shown towards Hagrid’s Hippogriff; unfortunately, the Hippogriff is an imaginary creature. In a series where animals are treated so cruelly, the Hippogriff exception seems like a cynical joke.

Before being corrupted by Hogwarts, Hagrid may well have been an animal rights activist. In *TCOS* we learn that a young Hagrid “opened the Chamber of Secrets”, thereby freeing a spider armed with “razor-sharp pincers” (184). The spider—Aragog—vowed that he and his descendants would be Hagrid’s friends. Thus, according to one reading, Hagrid was expelled from Hogwarts for an act of environmental activism, Tom Riddle’s falsehoods about the evil spiders notwithstanding.

VI. Conclusion

The intense anti-environmental currents in *HP* makes it unique in the literary world. From folklore to the Bible to *The Chronicles of Narnia*, no

other writing compares. Adherents of ancient religions worshipped natural objects, and Jesus's parables use images of Nature to help him communicate spiritual ideas, but in *Harry Potter* characters almost always use images of Nature to deprecate Nature or to slander parts of Nature. *HP* also departs from examples set by Tolkien, Lewis Carroll and C.S. Lewis, for whom animals were often the mouthpieces of riddles and wisdom. And C.S. Lewis' pro-environmental themes (like saving trees) in the *Chronicles of Narnia* seem most remote from Harry's world.

The scant and obscure evidence found in "Exceptions to the Anti-Environmental Trend" provides some basis for an argument that *HP* has an enlightened undercurrent, but such evidence is utterly overwhelmed by the anti-environmental current. Consequently, Rowling's work is not a strong example of the genre Tolkien called fairy-stories. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories" he speaks with contempt of technology and claims that all fairy-stories contain an implicit condemnation of "progressive things like factories, or the machine-guns and bombs that appear to be their most natural ... products" (78). Perhaps even more significantly, Tolkien claimed that all good "fairy-stories deal largely ... with simple or fundamental things [meaning 'Nature']" (75). Well, *HP* is hardly simple. It is quite possibly the most convoluted children's series ever written.

What was Rowling's intention? Is her provocative work intended to awaken the public's sleeping conscience? That might have been a

legitimate tactic in a work of adult fiction, but in children's fiction? I do think something is askew.

- CHAPTER FOUR -

Christianity Parodied

I. Introduction

According to Marxist sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the need for popular writers to conform to conventions “explains why certain works of middle-brow art ... are continually bordering on pastiche or parody of previous authors, against whom they measure themselves” (“The Market of Symbolic Goods” 1243). Joanne Rowling’s work seems to fit this description, albeit in such a dry or British manner that the *borrowing* and parody go unnoticed by all but the most intrepid and over-read reader. This chapter will examine Rowling’s extensive allusions to Judea-Christian tradition, particularly the Bible, allusions that are parodic because they decorate the life of a harebrained hero.

II. Harry’s Nativity and Infancy

On the first page of the *HP* septaguint, the author invokes the life of Jesus and attempts to differentiate her young hero from Jesus. In

deliberate contrast to the rare meteorological event that accompanied Jesus's birth, baby Harry arrives at the doorstep of his aunt and uncle while "there was nothing about the cloudy sky outside to suggest that strange and mysterious things would soon be happening all over the country" (*TPS* 7). By alerting readers to the mundane circumstances of Harry's arrival, Rowling invokes Jesus's birth and marks her version as an intentional secularisation of the Christian version.

On the other hand, the unremarkable sky conceals the coming parody and appeal to the public's weakness for magic and pomp. The cloudy sky only veiled "[s]hooting stars all over Britain" (11), and many owls sightings in broad daylight, and a half-giant Hagrid flies on a motorcycle which then "fell out of the air and landed" (16). Like the angel Gabriel come to announce that a human being, Mary, will bear and raise God's son, so Hagrid delivers Harry, the child of magicians to mere Muggles, so that they may raise him.

Harry receives his special power from his mother's fatal sacrifice, and both mother and father "died because their best friend had betrayed them" (*TPOA* 157). Jesus's fatal sacrifice imparts the power of grace upon all mankind, and he dies because his friend, the disciple Judas, betrayed him. In this case it is Harry's mother who plays Jesus's role, and this both secularizes and feminizes Jesus's death and resurrection, so that it is not resurrection but mere immunity from *Voldemort*.

The visit of the three gift-bearing wise men to the newly born Jesus is also altered. Shortly after Harry's birth, three 'wise' persons visit him: Dumbledore (the Headmaster of Hogwarts), McGonagall (a professor), and Hagrid (the gamekeeper). While, the Gospel's wise men deliver gifts to the new-born Jesus, Rowling's wise persons deliver the saviour, Harry, to his perceived persecutors, his uncle and aunt.

Harry's adoption parallels Jesus's incarnation and adoption by the supposed stepfather, Joseph. Lewis' *Narnia* begins with the story of an orphan raised by an uncle who is a magician; Rowling's version secularises the Gospel story and Lewis' revision of the Gospel.

Somehow, by an obscure genealogy, Harry is related to Salazar Slytherin, the founder of the Slytherin house and builder of the secret chamber.

According to the legend [Slytherin] sealed the Chamber of Secrets so that none would be unable to open it until his own true heir arrived at the school. The heir alone would be able to unseal the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the horror within, and use it to purge the school of all who were unworthy to study magic. (TCOS 114)

So, Harry alone is qualified to perform a kind of harrowing of Hell, or rather a purging of Muggle-bloods from the magical world. Similarly,

according to the Gospels, Jesus is related to King David, and as his descendent he is qualified to fulfil Jewish prophecies about the genealogy of the Messiah.

In *The Half-Blood Prince* Harry is called “the Chosen One,” a title with three occurrences in the Bible and numerous echoes.

III. Voldemort, Death, and Blood

Lord Voldemort prolongs his life by hiding parts of his soul from death in the seven horcruxes. While the *HP* series is crammed with names, ‘horcrux’ may seem particularly exotic, obscure, cryptic. ‘Crux’ is Latin for ‘cross,’ the defining symbol of Christianity and the Lord Jesus’ resurrection. ‘Hor’ is a hononym for ‘whore’ and refers to a biblical mountain and Egyptian pharaoh. Pharaohs, of course, attempted to achieve immortality by putting their bodies in pyramids. Thus, in what can hardly be a coincidence, both ‘hor’ and ‘crux’ are connected to the function of the horcrux, and this connection reveals a meticulous parody of Christianity.

Voldemort’s attempt to wipe out Harry’s father’s bloodline has precedent in the Old Testament story of the attempt to wipe out Ahab’s bloodline (2 Kings 9:8). Voldemort’s desire to eliminate Muggle-blood

from Hogwarts also parodies the widespread interest among religious, political and other racist groups to keep their bloodlines ‘pure.’

For the ancient Hebrews, and in Hebrew Bibles, God’s name may not be spoken or written. As if Voldemort were God, in *HP* no one except Harry and Dumbledore seem able to pronounce “Voldemort.” Contrast this to Lewis’ Christian fiction, where the White Witch cannot bear to hear anyone pronounce the name of the Jesus-like, God-like, Aslan (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* 112).

If Voldemort is an effigy of the unpronounceable, unimaginable God, they are both simulacrum of the unimaginable, unspeakable, omnipresent, death. The ‘mort’ in Voldemort’s form the Latin root of ‘mortal;’ in French, the language in which Rowling holds a university degree, ‘mort’ means ‘death.’ ‘Volde’ might be derived from the Latin ‘volens,’ meaning ‘to will, or from the old English spelling of old, ‘olde.’ Thus ‘Voldemort’ could mean ‘the one who wills death,’ or ‘the old death.’ Judging from Lord Voldemort’s ways, and from the fear he instils, the old death is a terrible death, one to be resisted in flailing paroxysms of fear and fury. This horrible death contrasts with Dumbledore’s death, which is just a “great adventure” (*TPS* 215). Two different deaths are explicitly mentioned in Revelation, chapters 20 and 21, but there, according to the standard interpretation, the two deaths mark two different points in time, not two experiences of the same

reality. As such, Harry Potter's mission is a secularization of the Lord Jesus' mission.

A frankly stupid and misguided attempt to conquer the fear of death is evident in Chapter Six of *TPOA*. There Hagrid tries to persuade his students to bow before the vicious-looking Hippogriff, Buckbeak. Harry is the first to obey, which, depending on your perspective, reflects well on his courage and trust or implies an exceptional ignorance of death's real possibility. The bowing scene also contradicts the Lord Jesus' refusal to bow to the beast whom Christians call "Satan" (Mat. 4:9).

Harry's mission to overcome Lord Voldemort requires that he prevent the arch-villain from acquiring power and immortality. He does this partly by preventing Lord Voldemort from getting "*the Philosopher's Stone, a legendary substance [which] produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal*" (TPS 161). In the absence of this elixir, Voldemort is forced to drink the blood of unicorns (TPS 188). Since Catholic writers interpreted unicorns as symbols of their Lord, Lord Voldemort's dependence on blood is a gruesome parody of the literal and symbolic role of Jesus' blood.

In another macabre and mocking reversal of Christian symbolism, the body of Voldemort's father, given in ignorance, renews the son's life: "*Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!*" (TGOF 556). While in the Christian tradition Jesus's sacrificial body gives life to all who believe in him, in "Flesh, Blood and Bone" we find this

inversion, “*B-blood of the enemy . . . forcibly taken . . . you will . . . resurrect your foe*” (TGOF 557).

The name of Lord Voldemort’s supporters, the Death Eaters, may parody those Christians who eat the life of their Lord through the Eucharist.

In “Cornelius Fudge,” Easter arrives, but we encounter none of the religious or secular imagery and pageantry associated with it. Neither Jesus’s death and resurrection (the Christian basis for Easter) nor bunnies and eggs (the pagan signs of rebirth) are mentioned. However, immediately before mentioning the Easter holidays the narrative explains that the Mandrakes in Greenhouse Three are almost mature, and adds that when they are mature they shall “revive those poor people in the hospital wing” (TCOS 186). The Easter resurrection is replaced by its closest secular alternative, revival. But “those poor people” are dead, meaning we have resurrection through witchcraft. Actually, the people are “petrified,” which might mean a state of emotional paralysis, which leads us back to the existential reading of a fear of death.

The above heretical or existential reading is supported by a close look at the history of the name ‘Cornelius’ in the chapter title, Cornelius Fudge. In the Bible, Cornelius was the first Gentile to believe in the resurrection, and in English ‘to fudge’ means to hide the facts, so “Cornelius Fudge” associates lying with the core of the Christian belief,

the belief in lying. Moreover, the biblical Cornelius was a centurion, an enforcer of the law, while Rowling's Cornelius is the Minister of Magic, a man who also enforces the law. Lastly, Cornelius Fudge's surname also denotes a form of chocolate, a popular secular Easter-holiday indulgence, and this connection of Cornelius to food also has biblical precedent, for Peter interprets Cornelius' vision about forbidden foods before he teaches Cornelius about the resurrection (Acts 10).

'I am Lord Voldemort' is an ingenious anagram or riddle for 'Tom Marvolo Riddle'; the names are doubles, and the latter is more than an anagram, it is a meta-anagram, even a double-meta-anagram, for 'riddle' echoes 'anagram' and 'Tom' is short for 'Thomas,' which meant 'twin' (a kind of double) in Aramaic. Finally, the connection between Tom Riddle and the biblical 'Thomas' hardly seems accidental. After all, Thomas' claim to fame as the first person to question the possibility of resurrection, which is Tom Riddle's primary obsession.

IV. In The Beginning and In The End

Harry Potter's home is on Privet Drive. The word 'privet' is a word for shrubbery, which doesn't quite invoke images of the Garden of Eden, but consider that all the Dursleys have botanical names, and Dursley means "from the meadow." So, Harry's life before Hogwarts, his life with the Dursleys, symbolizes his prelapsarian or *au naturale* life, and the

world of magic is the supernatural life that destroys it. Of course, since Rowling wrote in the 20th century, the magical world is the technological world. This is why Hagrid drives a greenhouse gas belching motorcycle through the sky and onto Privet Drive and this is why Dumbledore arrives on Privet Drive carrying a blazing cigarette lighter (Why does he need a light? Because Privet Drive is the symbolic garden of our first ancestors, and therefore has no streetlamps). Rowling seems to provide an updated story of the biblical Fall.

Is the Whomping Willow a parody of the Tree of the Forbidden Fruit? The Whomping Willow might be part of the Forbidden Forest. It stands “alone in the middle of the grounds” (*TPOA* 136). In Genesis the Tree of the Forbidden Fruit stands “in the middle of the garden” (3:3). Eating this Forbidden Fruit causes death; entering the Forbidden Forest is to risk life and limb. The Forbidden Fruit bears the fruit of forbidden knowledge; the Whomping Willow guards a forbidden *entrance* of Hogwarts, the heart of the empire of illusion.

The Whomping Willow was planted precisely because Dumbledore was sympathetic towards a werewolf (*TPOA* 258). This is more than *ridiculous*. The dead werewolf, Lupin, was the teacher of the *riddikulus* or comical method for overcoming fear. As a teacher of comedy, even of parody, Lupin is associated with the antidote to fear and a level of textual meaning as hidden as the passage leading into the heart of Hogwarts, into a *chamber of secrets*, you understand, not a secret

chamber but a chamber containing the secrets of the *Harry Potter* trance.

Voldemort entrances the world in his own way, at times by hanging the Dark Mark like a Wal-Mart neon sign over the world. His servants, the Death Eaters, have “had the sign burnt into [them] by the Dark Lord” (*TGOF* 616). In Revelation, the evil beast “forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead” (13:16). Secondly, in *TPS* we learn from Hermione’s book that Nicolas Flamel, the creator of the dangerous Philosopher’s Stone, was completing his 666th year, which number, in the Bible, belongs to the Beast (Rev. 13:18). Again, these are not merely allusions to Christian scripture, they parody scripture, for Rowling’s Beast is the creator of a source of eternal life, the Philosopher’s Stone, and in Christian tradition eternal life is a good, not an evil.

There are “[s]piders the size of carthorses” (*TCOS* 204) who live in the Forbidden Forest, and their leader is Aragog, whose wife is Mosag (206). Both names were probably derived from biblical Gog and Magog (Ezekiel). Rowling’s version is a parody of the Bible because Gog and Magog are objects of Jewish fear, but Rowling transforms them into symbols of childish fear and phobia.

The title “The Writing on the Wall” (*TCOS* ch.9) refers verbatim to Daniel, chapter 5, a chapter sometimes titled “The Writing on the Wall.” In Rowling’s chapter, Filch complains that Harry “wrote on the wall”

(109). We are led to believe that the words written on the girls' toilet by Harry are the words "The Chamber has been opened," but three other words are added, and they are "Out of Order" (118). Likewise, Daniel 5 reveals three mysterious words, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin, written on the king's wall. In Daniel a dismembered hand appears and writes, and in *HP* "Hermione's hand was waving in the air" (113) (Note: 'Hermione' is derived from the Greek messenger god and patron of writers). Other parallels include the presence of magicians in both Daniel and *TCOS*. Both are also concerned with the existence of a person with special powers: only Daniel can interpret the writing, and Harry "alone would be able to unseal the Chamber of Secrets [and] unleash the horror within" (114). Rowling's rewriting is a parody because it turns Daniel into an idiot schoolboy, and it turns a 'divine' mystery into the 'vulgar' mystery of the female excretory organs and acts.

Rowling also produces numerical parodies. Chapter Ten ("The Marauder's Map") of *TPOA* echoes Chapter Ten of Revelation. In the latter, a certain John receives a scroll and hears the voices of the seven thunders. Rowling's chapter has a map showing the seven secret passages into Hogwarts. The owners of the map warn Harry to "wipe it after you've used it ... or anyone can read it" (144). In Revelation the angel who gave John the scroll on which to record the seven thunders says to him, "Seal up what the seven thunders said but do not write it down," presumably so that no one will ever be able to read it (10:4). In

both cases the possessor of written signs must prevent others from getting those signs. In addition, while the angel who gave the scroll “swore by him who lives for ever and ever” (10:6) a boy who gave Harry the Map makes a mockery of swearing by saying, “*I solemnly swear that I am up to no good*” (143).

In chapter one of Revelation “the seven spirits” appear and John is commanded to send seven letters to “the seven churches.” In “Owl Post,” chapter one of *TPOA*, Harry struggles to write an essay, and someone sends Harry four letters, one note, and one newspaper clipping. The missing seventh document is represented by the paragraph in Harry’s textbook *A History of Magic*, a paragraph which, like the other six documents, is italicised and separated from the body of Rowling’s narrative. “Owl Post” also mentions the “*Seven hundred galleons*” won by Mr Weasley, and refers to a picture of Mr and Mrs Weasley with their seven children, of whom only the seventh is female. Other parallels between Revelation 1 and *TPOA* 1: “The head and hair were white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire” (Rev. 1:14) and “His jet-black hair ... the eyes behind his glasses were bright green” (10). In Revelation 1, Jesus says, “I am the alpha and the omega,” meaning the first is the last. In *TPOA* the oneness of the first and the last is implied by the first and last chapter titles: “Owl Post” and “Owl Post Again.” Rowling repeats this first-is-the-last pattern in *TGOF*, whose last chapter is “The Beginning.” That last chapter also forms

textual parallels to both the beginning of *TGOF* and to the first two chapters of *TPS*. For example, *TPS* 1 contains the first kiss, and the last chapter of *TGOF* contains the last kiss.

V. Other Parodies of Scripture

Harry Potter's name nearly predestines him for a narcissistic personality disorder, colloquially known as the God Complex, for Biblical usage identifies his surname with God. "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8). And Rowling may also have aimed her parody at the British royal family, as among them is a prince of the same name and born only a decade before the publication of the first book.

The title "The Unforgivable Curses" (*TGOF* ch.14) refers to Jesus' words: "every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (Matt. 12:31). However, whereas Jesus condemns people who blaspheme the Spirit, in "The Unforgivable Curses" the curses are uttered against animals, namely spiders, which are hardly symbols of the Spirit. Moreover, in Rowling's parody the curser rather than the cursed is 'Moody,' a parodic choice because in popular usage 'mood' is almost synonymous with 'spirit.' The connection between Moody and forgiveness is strengthened later, when Moody asks Harry if Voldemort 'forgave' the Death Eaters

(586). As it turns out, Moody, or rather Crouch's son disguised as Moody, doesn't want anyone forgiven, which ironically is an attitude one might also expect from the real Moody, who was quick to anger and never expressed so much as regret for his violence.

The "Dementor's Kiss" occurs when Dementors "clamp their jaws upon the mouth of the victim and – suck out his soul" (*TGOF* 183). In the Gospel tradition, Judas' kiss seals Jesus's death. However, Judas' kiss is only responsible for Jesus's physical death, not for the loss of his soul. In contrast, the Dementor's kiss does not kill but does take the soul. The fact that Rowling should resort to such religious notions as the soul is unusual, although, of course, like much of what she touches, she alters it to suit her purposes. In *Harry Potter* the soul is not the seat of life, for Rowling writes, "[y]ou can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and hearts are still working. But [without it] you'll have no sense of self any more, no memory, no ... anything" (183). In short, the soul becomes synonymous with the brain, which is a biological organ. This little heresy explains why Rowling chose a man named 'Lupin' as the speaker of the above 'loopy' thinking. The pun is not frivolous; after all, Lupin was moved to 'lunacy' by the 'lunar' cycles, which turned him into a werewolf, a conversion of sorts that likely destroys his memory and sense of self...

Regarding phoenixes, Dumbledore says, "[T]hey make highly *faithful* pets" (*TCOF* 155). Why did Rowling italicize 'faithful'? Was it to draw

attention to the religious dimension? Or, was it to help us notice that the same word is italicized when it is uttered in contempt by Voldemort?

Following Harry's first encounter with Fawkes, Hagrid comes carrying a "dead rooster still swinging from his hand" (156). We later learn that many roosters are being killed, and that the rooster is the mortal enemy of the evil, namely the "*Basilisk, also known as the King of Serpents*" (TCOF 215). Since the cock is a Christian symbol of vigilance (Ferguson 3), so the helplessness of the roosters implies Rowling's criticism of Christian vigilance, i.e. of Christians waiting for the ultimate hero and savior, the Messiah.

In TCOS Harry flies in a car "past swirls and turrets of snowy cloud" (57). In the Gospels we read, "But in those days, following that distress ... men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:24,26). Jesus's power and glory associated with a car ... how fitting and true to the modern obsession with automobiles. Reality parodies itself.

Harry hears voices that really, honestly, permit him to prophesy the future. Jesus and other biblical characters prophecy as the mouthpieces of God, but the terrible voices in Harry's head seem to belong to Voldemort, just as Voldemort was in Quirrell's head *just as Rowling's voice is in every head that reads her words.*

In part, Harry is a parody of the resurrected Jesus. To parody Jesus's marks of the nails driven through him, Harry's forehead is marked by

“[a] curiously-shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning” (17). While both Jesus’s and Harry’s stigmata are used as proofs of their ability to survive (crucifixion for Jesus, massive voltage by Harry), the troubling element is that the forehead-worn lightning symbol has a Nazi history, as it was worn by the British Union of Fascists, a bunch of Nazi sympathizers. And Joanne Rowling likely knew this, judging from what she wrote in the Telegraph.co.uk.

A more curious parallel between Jesus and Harry is their refusal to obey established authority. Jesus called the religious authorities hypocrites (Matt. 23:3); when he was questioned by the Sanhedrin, he told them they would not believe his answer (Luke 22); when the chief priests, scribes and elders asked him, “by what authority are you doing these things?” (Mark 11:28) he answered with a question; and when Pilate asked if he is “King of the Jews,” he responded with the childish taunt “You say so” (Mark 15:2). Although Harry rarely lets authorities hear his lack of respect for them, he does constantly break the rules of the establishment. Jesus also transgressed the Mosaic code, the established law of his time. He worked on the Sabbath, and his whole mission seems to have been to replace the primacy of the law with a primacy of faith, love, and charity. Do Harry’s transgressions serve to replace the primacy of school policy with the primacy of his faith, love, and charity? Even if we conclude the affirmative, we are surely stumbling through the corridors of parody.

Jesus has the power to discourse with the demons of the possessed (Mark 9:25). Harry Potter has the power to discourse with serpents (*TPS* 26). But serpents are traditionally identified by Christians as symbols of the demonic; therefore, Harry and Jesus discourse with the same essence. While Harry was part serpent and Slytherin until Voldemort was destroyed, Jesus God made flesh until his victory over death through the resurrection.

A distinct inversion of the Gospel occurs in relation to touch. Jesus healed those who have faith and touch him (Luke 8:34), and he healed those whom he touched (Mark 5:23). In contrast, Harry causes great pain to his enemies when they touch him or he touches them. Again, Harry is a demonic parody of Jesus.

Other parallels between Jesus and Harry include their words and actions towards their enemies. Jesus said, “love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). In *TPOA* Peter Pettigrew, the man who betrayed Harry’s parents and caused their death, is now Harry’s enemy, and he is spared from certain death by Harry. Does this life-saving gesture amount to a gesture of love? Not if you consider that Harry condemns Peter to Azkaban, a prison that might, like Hell, prove worse than death (275). Similarly, when an armed crowd came to arrest Jesus “one of Jesus’ companions ... struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear” (Mat. 26:51). Jesus responds, like Harry, by discouraging his companions from killing his persecutors: “for all who

draw the sword will die by the sword” (26:52). But Jesus may have done so in order to avoid trouble, while Harry’s gesture of mercy ensures that his persecutors will continue their works against him.

While hanging from the cross, Jesus does not ask his almighty Father to cast his enemies into Hell. Instead he says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 22:34). In contrast, Harry forgives no one and pursues Lord Voldemort to the bitter, cataclysmic end. Even when he considers the dragons he must face, he admits he “wouldn’t have let his worst enemy face those monsters unprepared – well, perhaps Malfoy or Snape ...” (*TGOF* 298). Sure, feed them to the dragons and conserve the death penalty, too. Clearly the difference between Jesus and Harry is unbridgeable. Harry’s behaviour is immeasurably nearer to the behaviour of humans; Jesus’ is immeasurably more ‘fantastic,’ for it evinces a freedom from anger that—given his life and circumstances—seems hardly human.

VI. Love and Hatred

Harry often experiences pity, but his pity is always directed at the wrong people, at imaginary creatures, or at a mere image of a person. For example, when he sees a picture of “people halfway through transforming into other people” he hopes that “the artist had [only] imagined the looks of intense pain on their faces” (*TCOS* 124). In

contrast, he never pitied Sirius the time he spent in Azkaban, and he showed no pity or appreciation for the pain and injury suffered for him by his closest friend, and shows none after Ron and Hermione risked their lives for his success (*TPS* 205, 208). Of course, Jesus is not famous for a single outpouring of pity, regret or thanks, so they do have this much in common.... Alas, even “The Sermon on the Mount” reads like a politician’s list of promises rather than a poetic outpouring of feeling.

Few things anger Harry as much as criticisms and insults directed at his father. Similarly, Jesus famously flipped upon seeing a church turned into a bazaar because he considered the church his father’s house: “How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market” (John 2:12).

In *TCOS* Harry confesses “it is not possible to live with the Dursleys and not hate them” (150). This is a much more true-to-life expression of an abused and orphaned child’s feelings than what Jesus requires with his call to love our enemies. The trouble is, they might just be ideals, as we find when John prophesies that the Messiah will fling his enemies into “the lake of burning sulfur” (Book of Revelation, 20:10). What, then, is the difference between Christ and the violent boy hero who does not hesitate to condemn his enemies to Azkaban? If Harry’s feelings and acts of love and hatred are typical of children, we nevertheless need ask what someone so typical is doing in a work of fantasy. I suspect that the psychological realism of Harry Potter’s mind caters to readers who do not

want to be challenged, who have no hunger for thoughts that are different from their own, who have been raised on a mind-numbing diet of traditional and completely irrational fears and desires that many have no ability to question.

Time and time again, Rowling tempts her young readers with good thoughts about Harry. In *TGOF* Harry attempts to save the lives of Ron, Hermione, and Fleur's sister and in doing so he sacrifices points. What's worse, he soon realises that his good intentions were stupid. "Harry's feeling of stupidity was growing. Now ... it seemed perfectly clear that Dumbledore's safety precautions wouldn't have permitted the death of a hostage just because their champion hadn't turned up" (*TGOF* 438). Rowling undermines the significance of the hero/champion and turns good intentions into a farce. Nevertheless, Harry does not learn this lesson. Nor does he understand that his sense of self-importance and his anxiety-complex constantly drive him to save lives that do not need saving and be the hero no one needs.

How helpless is Harry? Ron and Hermione help Harry get the Philosopher's Stone, Moody and Hermione help Harry with the first athletic-heroic task, Dobby and Cedric help him with the second athletic-heroic task, and together Cedric and Harry complete the third. Harry never succeeds alone. In contrast, Jesus is beyond helping. He is abandoned by his friends, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and left to singly bear the guilt of all mankind. So why do children identify with

Harry more than Jesus? What possesses children, of their own volition, to read smoke through pages of Potter while the Gospels might as well be nailed to their shelves? Well, excuse me, but that is a stupid question. How can a child identify with Jesus? Jesus' life may be fantastic, but his interests share nothing in common with those of children, and to children his fate and superhuman independence must seem incomprehensible. That said, it remains to be proven that characters with whom children easily identify are necessarily characters who produce better effects on their development than characters who challenge out imagination.

In addition to the above-mentioned heroic bungles performed during Harry's athletic-heroic tasks, the outcome of one additional heroic effort suggests that our would-be saviour and hero, is doomed to acts of futility. He risks his life to save Cedric (544), but the risk is taken in vain, for Cedric dies of his wounds. Thos tragic result might be very realistic and instructive, but it is not likely to inspire young children to acts of self-sacrifice or heroism, and—to put it mildly—it contrasts very starkly with the efficacy of Jesus' recorded string of successful healings and savings.

VII. Conclusion

Incredibly, even shockingly, many Christians have been delighted by the series' apparent promotion of Christian values like love, and ... uhm.... This is stupefying. Apparently Rowling's parody is too subtle. Perhaps she was too cowardly to parody and satirize openly, as Aristophanes and many others have done before, but then *Harry Potter* would not be children's literature.

What if I am wrong? Good thinkers should always ask this question and have no fear of being wrong.

So, what if I have imagined the entire secret, backstage parody? What if I projected my own perverse vision onto the text and collected all my evidence in vain?

Some troubling evidence in support of a stupendous error has arisen. In *The Deathly Hallows*, the penultimate book, Christians hear "whispers" of Christianity and happily find, inscribed upon the Potter graves in *Godric Hollows*, verses from the Gospels. They happily celebrate Rowling's nod.

But let us inspect the above evidence more closely. Consider the italicized words and compare them. Now, if the God/hollow, Death/hallow pairing does not sound suspect, please consult a dictionary. Secondly, we must investigate the meaning of inscribing the words, "The last enemy who shall be destroyed is death" on gravestones, because this statement is the opposite of Dumbledore's portrayal of death as an adventure, not an enemy (*TPS* 215), and Dumbledore's

quotation was written—not on a gravestone but—on *The Sorcerer’s Stone* (the original title of *TPS*).

Is this very persuasive? Probably not. And Joanne Rowling is not helping by publicly stating that she always thought her work was based on Christian themes. But wait a second or two! Think about it: Based on Christian themes. Why, even a satire of Christianity would be based on Christian themes.

Indeed, the great, spell-casting witch has even said “she hesitated to make the religious parallels too explicit as the series developed to keep readers from anticipating too early where the story was *going*” (Heilman 16. Italics mines). *Too early?!!* At this rate, people will never know what her spells are *doing!* How will she ever be discovered for writing a profoundly, incredibly *heretical*, super-subtle and *bewitching* parody?

- CHAPTER FIVE -**Odds and Ends**

I. The Oxford Inklings

The influence or lack of influence of Lewis and Tolkien on the Potter series is more than I care to elaborate. I will restrict myself to suggesting a link between the Inklings, a literary group that included Lewis and Tolkien, and the Giant Squid living in Hogwarts Lake. I originally argued that the squid was Rowling, but now I have an inkling that it might symbolize Lewis and Tolkien. And the 'bread' tossed by Hogwart students to the squid is a pun on money (bread=money), which means the children are throwing money at the greedy, inky authors, children (and adults too!) who, being covered by the immense flood of ink produced by these voluminous authors, do not have a inkling about what they are paying for.

Since the Inklings were associated with and met at the University of Oxford, Hogwarts might be inspired by Oxford. The similarities are tantalizing. Ox = animal and Hog = animal, plus wart and ford form a pleasant jingle. Coincidentally, this identification also explains why

Hogwarts is full of professors instead of teachers, and a quick glance at the university's map will reveal a sizeable little lake.

Finally, according to rumours, Rowling has claimed or joked that the Giant Squid is Godric Gryffindor, one of the four founders of Hogwarts, and that the squid is the largest known animagus, a kind of *enigmatical* cloaking form used by wizards. The joke is on us, because Joanne Kathleen Rowling is the animagus of Joanne Rowling, whose animagus is a *bewitching* children's fantasy writer, but who is, in reality, something very different. Indeed, 'Kathleen' likely shares etymological roots with Hecate, the goddess of the underworld associated with witchcraft.

II. Parodies of Lewis?

As shown earlier, Sirius Black's name stands for light and darkness, good and evil. His name might also have been inspired by C.S. Lewis' names for the horses of good and evil, Coalblack and Snowflake, names Lewis lifted from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Similarly, in Plato's *Paedrus*, e two horses attached to the soul symbolize the competing powers of appetite and reason, which roughly translate into good and evil. Sirius Black, having both powers in him, and manifesting both in his actions, is therefore rightfully given a name that symbolises his morally ambiguous nature.

In Lewis' *The Silver Chair* the fire-dwelling Salamander is a great and almost mystical creature, but in Rowling's works the firework-spewing Salamander is a Hollowe'en accessory (*TCOS* 100). Draw your own conclusions about the import of this habit, but not without first questioning received opinions about Lewis' spiritual allegiance.

C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series and Rowling's *HP* series both comprise seven books. On the very last page of *The Last Battle* Lewis' narrator claims that the end of the *Narnia* series is really "the beginning of the real story." Rowling alludes to this by titling her last chapter of her fourth book "The Beginning." In Lewis' last paragraph the narrator says of the characters: "at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story". But I will provide more on this cryptic synonymy of the last with the first and the number four in part four, below.

III. The James Joyce Connection

The confidence that J.K. Rowling is a children's fantasy writer who writes children's books—pure and simple—might be dispelled upon a careful inspection of the evidence linking the Potter series to the esoteric literature of James Joyce. First, consider Rowling's borrowing of Joycean character names: We have Daedalus Diggle from Stephen Daedulus and Seamus Finnegan from *Finnegans Wake*. Bloom is the main sur-text

character of *Ulysses* and *HP* is overgrown with botanical and flowery names like Lily, Lavender, Fleur Delacour, Sprout, Daisy, Petunia, Florean, and Myrtle. Plus, the initials J.J. appear in *Flying with the Canons*, a book read by Harry with errant spelling.

Thematic similarities: Joyce's *Dubliners* is commonly misunderstood to relate the epiphanies of ordinary people, as *HP* is commonly misunderstood to relate the truly heroic behaviour of a schoolboy. Plus, the school years of Stephen Daedalus are arguably as tormented as Harry's.

Lexical similarities: both writers are prolific creators of words, though Rowling specializes in names and other nouns.

Autobiographical similarities: In their early adulthood, both authors were involved in radical thinking about the world. Joyce was involved in a Nicolas Flamel club and Rowling worked as a researcher and secretary for Amnesty International. Both authors seem to have consciously refused to write moral or philosophical works, the one choosing to write linguistic-aesthetic experiments (Joyce) that toy with the topical issues of the day, and the other choosing to write children's literature that, similarly, glosses over the topical issues of the day. The difference may be even smaller given the importance of children's nursery rhymes to *Finnegans Wake* and Joyce's record of treating everything as mere nursery rhyme.

A Comical-Thanatological Numerology

Death is central to *HP*, not only thematically but literally through Rowling's frequent use of the number four, a number that symbolizes death in Chinese and Korean tradition. The same ethnic connection is made by Rowling through Cho Chan, the Korean-Chinese girl who becomes Harry's first girlfriend (and symbolically his last). Cho Chan first appears in the *fourth* book and is the first girl to kiss Harry, a fact I mention only because kissing is linked to death through the Dementors, whose kisses remove the souls of their victims. Additionally, the series records Cho Chan as having *four* boyfriends, one of whom dies.

Judging from the above, death is also linked to the first, as if Rowling intended to remind us that death is not merely the end.

Among the textual evidence that the four Potter books form a closed circle is the title of the last chapter of the last book, "The Beginning". The only literal sense in which that chapter could possibly be said to describe a beginning is insofar as it describes the beginning of Voldemort's second life. Alternatively, "The Beginning" sends us back to the very beginning, that is, to the first chapter of the first book, thus closing the circle. This circular reading is plausible because evidence exist that Rowling was familiar with the circular narrative. In Chapter Two we saw that she

consciously played with the beginning-is-the-end structure; what follows will provide additional evidence.

Evidence of Rowling's familiarity with the circular narrative includes her allusions to James Joyce, the author of *Finnegans Wake*, the most famous circular narrative. These references include Seamus Finnigan and Dedelus Diggle. The latter name invokes Stephen Daedelus, a central character in the two books written before *Finnegans Wake*, and Rowling's "Finnigan" alludes to Joyce's *Finnegans*. There is also plump Molly Weasley, whose name and physique bears startling resemblance to Molly Bloom. Moreover, Molly Weasley's husband is a kind of surrogate father to *Harry*, and Molly Bloom's husband, *Harold*, is a surrogate father to Stephen. Finally, the 'flower' in Bloom's name is invoked by the French equivalent in Rowling's character *Fleur* Delacour.

The number four, as symbolic of *the last* (as the fourth book is the last) also plays a role in Rowling's elaborate end-is-the-beginning and last-is-first structures. In the first sentence of the first book, Rowling mentions Four Privet Drive. This connection between the number four, the last, and houses, is mirrored by Hogwarts' division into precisely four houses, leaving no room for an additional three.

Speaking of houses and their connection to the number four, note that the scene in the opening chapter of each of the first three books is set in the Dursley house, but the fourth book's first chapter is set in

Riddle House. The name of this house should raise questions. If Riddle House is a riddle perhaps it is the Dursley house. Indeed, like the Dursley house, Riddle House was occupied by a mother, father, son, and a mysterious fourth person who murdered these three. Who is the mysterious fourth person, the one who murdered the three people without breaking into the house? Who else but the magician-boy, Harry, the boy who was increasingly prone to violence? This connection between the first house and the last is supported by the mirror images formed by the first and last chapters of the fourth book. In the first chapter we have reason to believe that the three dark figures in Riddle House are the murderers of the three murder victims; in the last chapter Crabbe, Goyle, and Malfoy, three people, are struck unconscious, a state not far removed from death, by a flurry of spells from the trinity of Harry, Hermione, and Ron.

If Rowling's four books form a complete set this implies that Harry's four years of recorded education is a complete education. This in turn suggests that Harry has completed a four-year undergraduate university degree rather than a primary or secondary education. This makes sense, because if we believe that Rowling will write seven books recording seven years of education we face the problem that this number of years corresponds to the number of years completed by primary students in Britain, and such students finish their studies at the age Harry starts. If Hogwarts is a university this also explains why its instructors are called

professors rather than teachers or headmasters, and why its students must purchase many textbooks, and why Hermione, despite her age, is a political activist. The fact that other aspects of life at Hogwarts do not agree with the interpretation that it is a university does not disprove the evidence that it is, for Rowling normally combines irreconcilable facts to create her fictions.

More evidence for the hoax theory lies in the connection of the number seven to the Weasel family (they have seven children) and to the word *weasel*. This etymological move is significant because *to weasel* can mean to renege or to evade an obligation, for example, to write books. In addition, the literary hoax is invoked by the notorious Weasley twins, who write something they say was intended as a joke, but on another level was intended to make them wealthy. Both intentions probably inspired the one time unemployed and single mother, Rowling, to write her four-part series.

In support of the hypothesis that the last chapter of the fourth book is the end of the series, we can argue that this chapter records the end of Harry's life. This is true if we interpret the kiss Harry receives from Hermione as a kiss of death. This is implied because Rowling associates kissing with death and with the Dementors who give the kiss of death. If Harry is really dead, a ghost, after receiving Hermione's kiss, and if the four books form a circular narrative, this explains the curious nature of the very first chapter's title. "The Boy Who Lived" suggests that

Harry no longer lives but is dead – as he should be if the first chapter follows the last. Against this reading sceptics might argue that no evidence exists that Hermione was a Dementor; however, they surely forget how Hermione annoyed or *demented* Harry and Ron throughout the series. In addition, we might consider Hermione's kiss symbolic of Harry's initiation into puberty, a theme Rowling promised to explore in subsequent books. The point is that boys entering puberty are often *demented* by their sexuality and by girls in general, and there is a long tradition in children's literature of not exploring sexuality, a tradition Rowling does well to conserve by not continuing the series.

Further support for the hoax theory lies in the fact that, if the four chapters of this thesis are persuasive, an element of hoax pervades the entire series, and this shows that making a seven-book hoax would be consistent with her habit. In a sense, Rowling's literary product is a Weasley joke product.

We now hear that Rowling has elaborated her hoax by claiming that the unpublished fifth book will be titled *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. This is important, even ironic, because the phoenix's last act was to give hope to Harry, which is precisely what the author's last act is giving to Harry's fans, that is, she gives them hope by claiming to be writing a fifth book. The connection between the phoenix named Fawkes and the number five is strengthened by the reference to Guy Fawkes, whose failed 'plot' is remembered every November 5th in Britain.

Critics might dismiss this theory of a hoax on the grounds that it is too grim to end the series with Voldemort's resurrection (that is, his new beginning). However, the so-called resurrection of evil is not even an issue for readers who know the hidden ambiguities and subtleties that Rowling uses to undermine the difference between good and evil. If it seems cruel to *steal* the last three books from the series remember the words of *Filch*, "hard work and pain are the best teachers" (TPS 181). And let us try to appreciate the joke Rowling enjoys whenever she tells critics they cannot judge her until the seventh book is published. And finally, consider the joke she did enjoy at the expense of screen writer Steve Cloves: when he repeatedly queried her about her next book he remarked about her non-responses by saying, "J.K. Rowling will not tell me the ending ... It's become sort of a 'Thou shalt not know until book seven'" ("We're Off to See the Wizard" 66). Finally, perhaps one day we will think of the *Harry Potter* hoax as a fact that almost redeems a series that really goes too far in appealing to the basest desires.

Harry's final thoughts in the last sentence of the series is significant. Those thoughts are that "what would come, would come ... and he would have to meet it when it did." Harry, like Harry's readers, is left in anticipation of the future. Of course Harry does nothing to prepare himself for what must come, and that will likely lead him to repeat his mistakes. As careful readers of Harry's life we should avoid that mistake and prepare ourselves for the worst.

But, perhaps Rowling will publish the promised books after all. If she does, would that undo everything written here? Does she need to be aware of the subtext described here for its description to be valuable? If the answer is yes then perhaps the way out is to say that this essay was written in jest.

(The third enemy, who leads the other two, is Malfoy, whose name was apparently derived from Edmund Spenser's Sans Foy, the evil character who appears in his *The Faerie Queene*. Sans Foy is French for faithless, and *Malfoy* is a French neologism meaning *bad faith*.)

EPILOGUE

Some years have passed since I first wrote about the Potter series. Having mellowed with time I sometimes regret calling the series “a calculated and cynical rejection of humanitarian values and an exploitation of the modern child’s basest needs.” Somehow, this conclusion doesn’t fit Joanne Rowling, whose history reveals a genuinely divided person, a person struggling to reconcile humanitarian ideals with the acquisition of an immense wealth, a person who throws money both at luxury and charity, hires lawyers to defend her profits and yet feels her own profits are excessive. “[C]alculated and cynical” don’t seem to fit an author who, like her hero, tries to improve the world in the most ‘magical’ and instantaneous manner possible, with money. While I won’t dispute that money can be put to many good uses, and building orphanages is one, neither orphanages nor youth counsellors can stop children from being orphaned, for that we must address cultural or psychological errors, errors that should never be sweetened in the books we encourage our children to read.

By delineating and describing the well-organised structure of Rowling’s work this analysis might well explain what Rowling meant

when Dumbledore spoke obscurely about what is well-organised. This paper, by finding what Dumbledore called “patterns and links” in *Harry Potter*, has unveiled, revealed, and described some of the many ironies, parodies, ambiguities, parallels, symmetries, and circularities and other *loopy* patterns that appear in *Harry Potter*. Together these patterns indicate a very high level of organisation.

If *HP* really is a complex text rife with subtle patterns, two reasons explain why this is rarely recognised. The first reason lies with the reader, the second with the author and her work. Of these two reasons we can only address the latter. The latter reason holds that the complex subtext in *HP* is difficult to discern because its subtext is *too* subtle, and because its literal, simple, and surface text appeals, in two ways, too strongly to the weaknesses of its readership. These two ways are, first, that too many things about its hero are calculated to win sympathy from readers. These things include the fact that his parents die during his infancy, his step-parents are evil, he is bullied at school and at home, one of his teachers dislikes him, he is unjustly portrayed by a slimy journalist, his friends are treated unjustly, and the most evil being alive wants to kill him. Second, too many things about Harry are calculated to appeal to common desires. These things include the fact that he becomes a sports star who eats junk food and does not exercise, he has all the best toys, he enjoys revenge against his cruel step-parents, he disobeys all the rules at school and suffers few negative consequences, he is a

celebrity, he has piles of money, and he has the prettiest date dressed in “robes of shocking pink, with her long dark plaits braided with gold, and gold bracelets glimmering at her wrists” (*TGOF* 358). The more great and terrible things that happen to Harry the more difficult it will be for readers to look into the Mirror of Erised and realise they are only seeing what they desire to see and what they desire to sympathise with. To argue against this criticism by stating that these great and terrible things are universal themes in fairy tales, and that they are not unlike devices commonly used in pop culture, simply suggests that this critique might apply too much more than *Harry Potter*.

All this is to say that, like good propaganda, *HP* offers a realistic representation of base desires. For this reason it is not surprising that Rowling’s readers often read each of her books “in a single sitting” and “six and seven times apiece” (“Newsweek” 23). This does not mean that our dreams should not be fulfilled or that our fears should not be exorcised. The danger lies in books that vicariously fulfil base dreams and in books that cause us to leave real problems unsolved by letting us experience catharsis through characters whose problems bear no resemblance to our own. Though catharsis and vicarious triumphs might in themselves be healthy, they are not acts of critical thinking, and if readers do not develop the ability to think critically than real problems will never be properly addressed, and we shall live in dreamland even while being technically awake.

If *Harry Potter's* complexities are really too subtle for children should they be reading it? The issue here is not simply whether children are capable of comprehending Rowling's complexity, the issue here is that if readers do not recognize the complex subtleties that raise questions about the immoral story and its irrational hero, those readers will themselves become or remain immoral and irrational.

Assuming that this essay successfully argues that *HP* is an immoral series that caters to the market's need for a thoughtless reiteration of popular values like irrational violence, competition, discrimination, slavery, animal abuse, deprecating language and verbal abuse, and so forth, this essay might still face criticism. For example, critics might still not be persuaded by the evidence that irony, parody, and a critical voice undermine the entire series. Against that criticism only one more thing may be said in my, and/or Rowling's, defence. Rowling holds a Masters degree in French, and she once worked for Amnesty International, and surely it would be rare for a graduate of the humanities and a former employee of an institute of ethics to tell an immoral story without a single note of criticism or parody.

Two other possible criticisms exist. First, it may be argued that Rowling can be defended without recourse to a critical subtext because she does not actually advocate any of the immoralities that appear in her works. This criticism ignores the fact that if heroes fulfil childish fantasies by committing immoral actions young readers risk being

persuaded to overlook the immorality. This does not mean that children will necessarily become unjustly violent, that is only the most dramatic and easily recognised immoral act, it is not necessarily the worst.

Second, my moral concern can be critiqued, and Rowling defended, on the grounds that, because children can distinguish between reality and fantasy, Rowling's books will not cause anyone to live according to the values and actions of her characters. This criticism ignores the fact that even if children do distinguish between fantasy and reality, doing so does not prepare them to deal with reality. If secular authors do not provide youth with realistic and morally exemplary actions, how will readers learn to deal with real conflicts in a moral manner? They will not learn this by watching television, or through science and computer studies.

Now, if we must issue a moral condemnation of a book written for children, must we also, like Plato, demand the exile of persons who write anything that should not be imitated? Plato wrote,

We shall not admit into our city stories about Hera being chained by her son, or of Hephaestus being hurled from heaven by his father when he intended to help his mother who was being beaten ... whether these stories are told allegorically or without allegory.

(The Republic 378d)

Plato seems to ban any literature that contains immoral images. But here Plato makes a rare reference to a literary device, allegory, a device that, like ironic and other polysemic uses of language, increases the complexity of literary structures. Again, the problem in *HP* is that these uses of language are too subtle, at least for the current readership.

The importance of polysemic writing and reading cannot be underestimated. Polysemic writing encourages readers to reflect on meaning, to think about their beliefs, thoughts or ideas; that is, it encourages readers to recognise that their interpretation of a text might be false, and that other meanings might exist. Thus polysemic writing encourages meta-thinking. Maire Messenger Davies draws the connection between this activity and morality. According to her children cannot be moral beings unless they engage in meta-thinking. Children who are unable “to think about a belief as false” will never be able to distinguish between right and wrong beliefs (17). In *Conflict and Concensus* Hodges reiterates the importance of being able to take a critical view of things. As much as children who are continually told what to do, children inculcated with our modern apathetic, passive, *laissez-faire* attitude and reading habits are equally incapable of critical thinking.

Hamil’s critique of television applies, with little qualification, to the printed *Harry Potter*. Echoing Ellul’s worries about passive readers of propaganda, Hamil notes that “audiences do not participate in

television's imaginative acts" (268). The television viewer is a passive receiver, regardless of whether what it communicates is realistic or not. Active thinking, that is, imagination, does not actually occur in readers of imaginative works until, by more or less consciously raising questions and creating answers they alter the received images and messages. Such altering does not occur when we read *HP* only on a literal level, and so anyone who reads it literally risks becoming deeply indoctrinated into its surface ideology.

If children learn to read allegorically or ironically or in any other way but literally, they will develop the power to free themselves from the danger of blindly imitating or obeying a literal text. This high opinion of allegory is not based on a belief that the subtext or alter-text must present a morally acceptable narrative. It is enough to be forced to look at a text, or at the world, from different perspectives for readers to develop the skills that enable them to think and be human. Without an element of ambiguity, without some multisemy, a work of fantasy, no matter how fantastic, is hardly better than info-news.

Jacques Ellul's argument about propaganda is relevant to this argument about polysemy and ambiguity. Ellul argues that most successful propaganda campaigns depend on a literate population – albeit a population that reads *passively*. The propaganda machine uses passivity by first overwhelming the reader with upsetting information, thus winning our sympathy, and then by “giving modern man all

embracing, simple explanations and massive, doctrinal causes, without which he could not live with the news” (147). And all propaganda must avoid being ambiguous, for “[a]mbiguity is painful for [modern man]” (190).

Irony, parody, or the propaganda-like simplicity of a political speech were never used by the humanist authors of the Renaissance, nor need they be used by modern scholars. Humanist authors practised *utramque partem*, the art of arguing both sides of an issue, and they believed readers could choose the correct side. This present work was written with the conviction that moral decisions will be made if readers learn the art of recognising subtexts through meta-thinking.

Kenneth Burke says something very similar in the following, “Further, we cannot use language maturely until we are spontaneously at home in irony” (*Language as Symbolic Action*, 12). The mature use of language encompasses not only irony but many forms of non-literal meaning, allegories and parables included. Jesus says he speaks in parables in order to “utter things hidden since the creation of the world” (Matt. 13:35); others say he spoke in parables in order to couch spiritual truths in a language peasants understand; the present argument suggests that parables also serve to force the mind to free itself from images and to overcome passivity.

This iconoclastic view of images raises serious questions about the value of imagination and about claims that *HP* is a work of remarkable

imagination. Perhaps *HP* does manifest imagination, but that does not mean that it engages the mind much more than a work void of imagination. For a work that only presents fantastic images does very little to inspire thought beyond the most immature levels. As Lewis remarked, such “fantastic” books only appeal to lazy people who want to “surrender their imaginations to the guidance of an author” (*An Experiment in Criticism*, 64). Ultimately, if stories are devoid of question raising devices, then both very imaginative works and works of mundane realism spoon-feed pre-fabricated images to readers. If, in addition, these images appeal to immature desires, there is very little chance that readers will develop the ability to think critically.

Although *HP* does present more than a literal or monosemic flow of ideologically conservative images, it does too little to help children register the questions lurking beneath those images. We need better clues, and not so much secrecy. Harry says essentially the same thing when he complains that Cedric’s hints should “have been a lot more explicit” (*TGOF* 378). Harry’s complaint might imply that Rowling anticipated my complaint; it does not remove the cause for complaint.

Finally, I want to apologize to all my readers for two matters, 1) for not being thorough and 2) for not providing much evidence from books 5-7. Not every sentence in the first four books has been analysed, so I hope other scholars will not be too zealous and, for example, use one piece of evidence against one of my arguments and overlook the possibility that it

might agree with another of my arguments. Regarding the second point, I hope the patterns I have discovered will serve others who wish to continue to the end and beyond.

Finally, I am only too happy to leave the impression that I have overlooked something, for I do not much enjoy being a spoiler. Moreover, on both humanitarian and pedagogical grounds, we must always resist the temptation of doing too much for others.

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