

Hoax, Parody, and Conservatism

in

*Harry Potter*

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

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## List of Abbreviations

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

*TPS* = *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

*TCOS* = *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

*TPOA* = *Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban*

*TGOF* = *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

## PROLOGUE

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

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)

Joanne Rowling seems to have anticipated Harry Potter's fame when she wrote, "every child in our world will know his name" (*TPS* 15). Recently a *Preview* writer wrote that billions of dollars can be made from turning Rowling's *Harry Potter* books into movies "video and DVD sales, and toy, clothing and video game revenues" (66). This prediction is supported by the willing wallets of millions upon millions of fans who rush to theatres, bookstores, and wherever *Harry Potter* paraphernalia might be sold. Now, while hurricane-speed winds of *Harry Potter* media hype threaten to blow us away, we need a counter-wind, we need a kind of scholarly Rita Skeeter to take us back to the silent text, to show us whether or not this storm is a product of readers who, by surfing over images, read too fast and flatten everything.

To go beyond the surface images we will start by challenging the view that *Harry Potter* really is an imaginative work. We will do this by showing that despite its many imaginative images, those images perfectly reproduce the real and current beliefs that Jacques Ellul, in *Propaganda*, calls Western myths. Consequently we will not support the complaint that *HP* promotes Satanism and witchcraft, for such ‘myths’ are largely of the past, and are minor problems in relation to the very common and modern myths *HP* does reproduce. This essay will describe how those present and modern myths, or beliefs, are conserved and present in Rowling’s work. It will also describe how Rowling undermines the secular beliefs present in her work with irony, parody, and other devices, and how she subtly parodies both Christian texts and beliefs.

Some of the beliefs conserved in *HP* are the beliefs that the forces of good have the moral right to commit violence, animal abuse, and the systemic exploitation of the lower class. Other beliefs we shall touch upon are the belief or “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, the consequence of this is the citizen of modern democracies “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*. If we do not reflect on and judge what we read, then when we read *HP* we are in danger of missing its critical voice and of becoming unwitting slaves of the ideology present in its surface imagery.

## - CHAPTER ONE -

### **Popular Culture and Society**

#### i. Introduction

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, and superficially speaking her concern with modern ideology is a conservative one. For example, her depiction of a completely imaginary sporting event (Quidditch) is simply a composite of modern sports, and it lacks imagination insofar as its depiction completely conserves the popular value of 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 conserve its ideology.

Stevens implies a distinction between ideological and superficial realism in the following,

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)

*Harry Potter* makes its fantastic world seem real, and empirically possible, precisely because behind the faint and fantastic distortions of the physical world it represents our dominant ideology. In other words, because its characters experience fears and desires towards common objects of fear and desire, readers can relate to those characters, and consequently young readers think 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 *TPOA*). They are, as we shall see, "just like us" because they have all the vices common among average children, and because Harry's fame, money, victories, and powers cater to those base, common and all too real fantasies. According to C.S. Lewis's "On Three

Ways of Writing for Children,” this conservation of common desires in fantasy literature makes such literature superficially realistic (Lewis uses “realistic” to mean that which is possible, I use it to mean that which is common). The consequence is that children are happy while they read such fantasy but are unhappy afterwards because the fantasy is not realised. In contrast, the desires fulfilled by characters in true fantasy are not the kind that can be confused with any child’s real desires, and therefore it cannot leave the child unhappy after the story is over.

This chapter will explore how Rowling’s fantasy world conserves the fears and desires, or values and beliefs of the modern world, by mimicking its social structures, celebrations, technology, gender roles, and so forth.

## ii. Modern Social Structures

Like the real world in contemporary England, Rowling’s magical world exists with governmental structures, an educational institution largely devoid of humanities, diverse jobs and employee and employer relationships, a monetary system, class divisions, and skill specialisation. 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, and the belief that specialisation is a good thing. In other words, Rowling's imaginary versions of all these things and practices do not communicate imaginary values, for our modern values are left intact.

In *HP* the educational institution is largely represented by the school of magic, Hogwarts, which was patterned after the traditional "Gothic-style boarding school" (Tucker 222). Its curriculum includes Herbology, History, Muggle Studies, Care of Magical Creatures, Potions, Defence Against the Dark Arts, and Divination. Despite this pseudo-medieval courses, Hogwarts is, in many respects, very modernised. With its co-ed classes, telescopes, and its emphasis on preparing students for jobs, Hogwarts operates more like a modern English public school than like a Gothic boarding school or medieval cathedral school. However, the fact that Harry and friends are usually bored with their classes, and often express contempt for their professors, seems to hint at a critique of the education system.

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 Valentine's; 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. The fact that the working class are non-human beings, elves, goblins, and gargoyles, is either the product of Rowling's satirical appropriation of stock fantasy figures, and/or represents her critique of how, in reality, the wealthy treat the poor as sub-humans.

In what seems like an ingenious stroke of irony Rowling makes the only man who uses a broom properly a failed wizard, namely Filch, the "the Hogwarts caretaker" (*TPOA* 99). Filch also represents an exception to the rule that the working class in *Harry Potter* are non-humans. But Filch, being a failed student of wizardry, cannot be a decent human being. His name means 'to steal,' and he is bad-tempered, and he is so full of bitterness that he "wage[s] a constant war against the students." Filch's disturbed behaviour is a piece of social criticism if the blame is placed on society and specifically on the education system, it is a piece of cultural conservatism if we assume that Filch's temper is a product of his nature.

A great deal of what happens at Hogwarts looks like modern capitalism more or less distorted by fantasy. In *TPS* Hagrid's servant owl demands payment for delivering the newspaper (49). A page later Harry learns that his schooling at Hogwarts will be paid for, and that his wizard parents stored their gold bullion in a wizard bank called Gringotts. At Gringotts we find a hundred goblins working as bank-

tellers. Indeed, money and financial exchanges are pervasive in the first four books. For example, rather than receiving his wand and robes as a gift earned in a test of courage or other quality Harry must go to London to purchase all his wizard supplies at the Leaky Cauldron. Rowling's satirical critique of the monetary system lies in what might be Harry's most subversive act. Harry donates his money to the Weasley twins, to help them start a business that sells joke products like malfunctioning wands, brooms. This is commendable because the Weasley joke products are products that resemble 'genuine' or 'legitimate' products, but actually are not, and as such they are sure to undermine the trust upon which all economies rely.

### iii. Various Activities

In addition to having socio-structural similarities, the world of Hogwarts also has many of the rituals and habits common to modern people with disposable time and income. These habits include competitive sports and schools, dances, gambling, violence, and questionable nutrition.

Competition is an essential habit of capitalistic peoples, but competitive sports were long ago incorporated into the British education system, so, not surprisingly, competitive sports are also present at Hogwarts. Furthermore, the whole student population at Hogwarts is divided into four 'houses' that must compete against one another for

points, a fact based on Gothic-style boys public schools (Brock 141). Rowling develops and parodies this historical custom by having the four houses strive to win the house cup in a combined sports and academic performance competition. This Hogwarts obsession, like the Hogwarts curriculum, conflicts with Harry's personal and spiritual need to deal with death and confront Voldemort, the manifestation of all his fears. When Harry does finally confront Voldemort he behaves like a common gun-slinging thug, and only succeeds in further provoking Voldemort. These facts, in addition to the fact that Voldemort grows stronger throughout the series, show that Harry was betrayed by Hogwarts, and as such they represent the author's critique of the education system.

In *TGOF* Harry and his pals are introduced to and 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. Although the young twins win their bet and aspire to be capitalist entrepreneurs, they intend to use their money to open a joke shop, a shop that, with its false products, can easily be interpreted to be one that makes a joke of the financial world.



Concerning the dietary habits of the children at Hogwarts, 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). The first part seems false. Except for one or two exceptional meals, the dietary regimen at Hogwarts closely resembles the First World student’s nutrient deficient, fat and sugar rich diet. Harry’s first “pig-out” at *Warthogs* 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 the second part of Tucker’s assessment, it is more important to note that Rowling likely deliberately ignored C.S. Lewis’ example in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. 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). By ignoring Lewis’ example Rowling conserves the popularity of sweets. Still, some evidence of irony is present within her toothache-free sugar-coated world. Consider the horrifying toothless Dementors, and those satirical scenes in which the Lupin and the Minister of Magic try to calm and console a traumatised Harry by giving him chocolate (*TPOA* 65, 285). And, of course, there is that hilariously

stupid remark made by Harry that “[t]hey saved my life, those cakes” (*TGOF* 54).

Considering the popularity of alcohol in England and in the technologically developed world generally, it is not surprising that we also find Rowling’s characters meeting in pubs and partaking of the old spirit. 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 non-alcoholic beverage that is popular among third and fourth year Hogwarts students because they are approaching the legal drinking age in England. However, in *TGOF* we find an abused elf who symbolises the lower class apparently drunk on butterbeer (467). The scene is funny if read superficially; on closer inspection it reads like a critique of a world that allows the downtrodden to prolong injustice by drowning their thoughts in alcohol.

The sport of choice at Hogwarts is Quidditch. This sport is a magical brew of English football, rugby, polo, and pheasant hunting. The four houses compete against one another in the intramural playoffs, and nations of magicians compete in the Quidditch World Cup. The latter event, as it is recorded in *TGOF*, bears immense resemblance to modern major sporting events, and hardly passes for fantasy literature. The sheer audacity of this might itself represent an act of mockery, albeit not of the ideology behind competitive sports as of the reader’s

willingness to run from the real world into one that is essentially the same.

A scene containing a particularly prolonged, graphic and, to put it mildly, a *bizarre* display of violence is the scene in which Ron's leg is broken. It reads a like scene from a Martin Scorsese movie rather than a scene from a children's fantasy novel. The great black dog, Sirius Black, breaks Ron's leg while dragging him into a burrow. We then 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" there is 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. But this scene does more than conserve our culture. Popular entertainment increasingly revels in moral ambiguities, and Rowling pushes this trend to absurdity. For example, we are led to believe that Sirius Black is Harry's friend; but if Ron is Harry's friend why would Sirius, for apparently no reason, attack them and break Ron's leg? Ultimately there is no plausible reason other than Rowling's desire to make a mockery of current trends in popular entertainment, which she

accomplishes even more effectively by doing it in the most inappropriate genre.

Rowling also conserves popular culture with her incorporations of many secular and religious celebrations. In *TPS* *Hollowe'en* is celebrated without masks and costumes. However, on close inspection we might conclude that the almost-violent giant troll is Hagrid in costume. The theory that the incident with the giant troll was a *Hollowe'en* prank orchestrated by the school authorities 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 real horrors, then again it also seems like a piece of mere literary cleverness.

In *TCOS* Rowling makes *Hollowe'en* more real by reviving an older and now extant form of that festival, that being the Day of the Dead. She does this by bringing corpses and "dancing skeletons" to the Hogwarts *Hollowe'en* party. This, rather than adding fantasy to an already fantastic festival, makes *Hollowe'en* real again, and its reality climaxes when Harry hears a voice threatening to kill him. Thus again Rowling turns *Hollowe'en* into a day on which Harry must deal directly with his fears.

*TCOS* begins in the normal world and on Harry's birthday. Harry has normal expectations, and those, not being fulfilled, lead him into a truly pathetic state of self-pity that inspires him to sing happy birthday to himself (11). This is really despicable because Harry, like most children of his age, has shown little pity for anyone else. Does Rowling want us to pity Harry? Probably not. Rowling does not seem to take birthdays very seriously. She even invents an almost sinister parody of the birthday ceremony in Nearly Headless Nick's death day party (which falls on Hallowe'en).

Perhaps because modern celebrations of Christmas, Christ's birthday, are already typically void of religious meaning, Rowling took few artistic liberties with Christmas. In *TPOA* Christmas marks an occasion for shopping and gift giving. Chapter Twelve of *TCOS* partly occurs on Christmas day, and during that time Harry receives five gifts. There are also the usual secular trappings: a 'Christmas' tree, eggnog, carols (which are not necessarily religious), and decorations. And this same chapter begins with a reference to a non-Christian image of resurrection: Fawkes the phoenix must "die and [be] reborn from the ashes" (155). The phoenix, as a non-Christian symbol of resurrection, could still be used by Rowling as a symbol for Christ. If this was her intent the fact that Harry was unaware that it was Fawkes' day of death and resurrection accurately reflects the trend among secular youth. The fact that Fawkes saves Harry from the Basilisk but only gives Harry

hope, by singing, during his final showdown against a stronger Voldemort (in *TGOF*) hints at Rowling's critical opinion of Christ.

Regarding the phoenix Dumbledore says, "[T]hey make highly *faithful* pets" (*TCOF* 155). Rowling probably italicised "faithful" to draw attention to her mocking association of faith with domestic animals. In *TGOF* the word "faithful" is spoken derisively by Voldemort, and is again italicised. In the first case the italicised "faithful" occur in the narrator's voice, in the second in Voldemort's voice, as if to say that Voldemort and the narrator (or Voldemort and Rowling) have something in common.

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 "*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 the efficacy of Christianity.

Valentine's Day is recorded in Chapter Thirteen of *TCOS* without much alteration, and like other popular activities discussed, the popular value placed on Valentine's Day has also been conserved. The only evidence that Rowling is criticising Valentine's Day lies in the fact that Lockhart's idea of celebrating it entails forcing dwarves to demean themselves, and in the fact that Harry makes no effort to give anyone a Valentine, and in the fact that rather than reading a girl's confession of

love for him he gets to face his fears by reading the thoughts of the evil genius Tom Riddle.

#### iv. Technology and Art

The glorification and ubiquitous presence of technology, both common traits of our modern society, is reflected in *Harry Potter*. The first evidence of this occurs when Dumbledore uses a magic silver cigarette lighter to illumine Privet Drive. Harry's magical world also includes locomotives, buses, flying automobiles, submarine-ships and flying carriages. We also find magical household appliances and gadgets. Harry may be a wizard, but with all his gadgets he bears more resemblance to a modern white-collar worker than to a wizard. He has his broom, his Maurader's Map, the Pocket Sneakoscope, the Invisibility Cloak, and his magical wand, and without them he is helpless.

Some of Harry's traditional magical props, like the broom, have names suggestive of modern high-tech products, and they are regularly improved. Not only are brooms bought, but the brooms are sold in a variety of 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 Firebolt. Arguably Harry's possession of a superior flying broom, not his skill, that helps him win the Triwizard Tournament. Although this

emphasis on the value of the instrument and on the material world in general is a refreshing departure from the norm in this genre, it also represents a mockery of the spiritual element common to the fantasy genre. We might also ask why Harry gets the incomparable Firebolt from Sirius without earning or paying for it? (Perhaps Rowling wished to remind us of the hypocrisy of modern 'freedom,' since often one's economic success depends on having friends in high places.)

The subject of technology overlaps with the subject of art insofar as Rowling blurs their representations. Just as technology increasingly caters to the modern obsession for realism by increasingly improving its ability to accurately reproduce visual and aural appearances, so at Hogwarts paintings and imaginary voices are so real that they are often mistaken for the real thing. Hogwarts students relate to the paintings and voices in Hogwarts on a literal level, and they do so because they are not taught to any other way. Harry might physically pass beyond the surface of paintings, but he does not do so mentally. Consequently he does not make any connection between the voice that says "rip, tear, kill" and the pictures that were supposedly ripped by Sirius Black, who transmutes into a dog, and the name of his aunt's dog - "Ripper" (*TPOA* 27).

In conformity to the dominance of aesthetic realism, the paintings at Hogwarts depict human figures that speak, move, and sometimes move to different pictures. Such moving pictures were probably inspired by



modern film technology. Another connection between technology and Hogwarts art is that just as televisions often function as babysitters and as portals of escape, at Hogwarts the moving pictures function as portals into otherwise inaccessible rooms, and they function as babysitters by preventing anyone without proper passwords from moving freely through the school. Babysitting and escapism is not necessarily a bad thing. However, at Hogwarts the babysitting service prevents Harry from confronting fears he must confront, while his escapes from Hogwarts are justified because they bring him closer to a confrontation with his fears.

In *TCOS* Harry does something that resembles an email conversation: he writes to Tom in Tom Riddle's diary, through which Tom also responds. In this same diary the page for June thirteenth "seemed to have turned into a miniscule television screen" (180). In *TPOA* Harry acquires the Maurader's Map of Hogwarts as a Christmas present. This map represents a blueprint of Hogwarts and represents the school's inhabitants in real time with moving dots, dots that are labelled and that emit word bubbles when the person represented speaks. The Maurader's Map seems to be a simple variation of the printed cartoon genre and of some high tech global positioning system or infra red gadget. Again, as so often happens with Rowling's technological bias, the addition of this useful map to Harry's growing collection of magical instruments reflects our culture's growing reliance on technological

gadgetry. In more traditional examples of the fantasy genre the wizard relies far more on wits. However, as we shall see in Chapter Four, Rowling has parodied the genre and our dependence on technology by making Harry extremely wit deficient.

Rowling's conservation of popular values is further evident in her representation of photography and anthropomorphic sculpture, and in the absence of abstract and conceptual art. Students at Hogwarts have an entirely low-brow and utilitarian relationship to this art. Instead of using magical animal tunnels, or dressers, or mirrors or similar portals commonly used in the genre, Rowling's characters use paintings and statues, and they use them in such a way as to remind us that students at Hogwarts are not students of the arts. The simple command-response interactions which Hogwarts students have with their paintings conserves the value we place on such user-friendly 'art' as video-games, and it seems to anticipate the future of domestic appliance technology. Again, this ultra-mundane function of art in Hogwarts perfectly conserves the status of painting in modern popular culture. In that culture paintings are not objects of profound and extended contemplation and questioning that leads beyond facile surfaces to a recognition of deep structures and meanings. Instead Hogwarts students get art that is so realistic they effortlessly pass into their illusory worlds, just as readers typically want literal and easily believable stories.

Another example of pandering to the masses' low-brow taste for art exists in the touching scene where Hagrid gives Harry a book "full of wizard photographs. Smiling and waving at him from every page were his mother and father" (*TPS* 220). Why would Harry desire pictures of people he cannot remember, even with the help of photographs? No doubt the moving photographs cater to Harry's desire to be with his parents. Whatever the value of this desire may be, appealing to it with high-tech illusions does not make for a rational mind. More importantly, this gesture by Hagrid contravenes Dumbledore's warning not to dwell on images of desire (seen in the mirror of Erised), which warning should be heeded by every reader (*TPS* 157).

#### v. Social Realism

A slightly superficial if not precisely conservative tendency in *Harry Potter* includes the frequent associations made between evil and an immature notion of ugliness. "In these stories, to look bad is to be bad" (Tucker 225). Harry boldly expresses this immature trend in *HP* when he says to the evil Tom Riddle, "You're ugly, you're foul!" (*TCOS* 233) And strangely all the Slytherins, rather than being slender, seem to be fat, large, and awkward. Ugly and stupid people are also frequently compared to animals, a theme to be fully detailed in Chapter Three.

Rowling's depiction of gender roles represents another way in which she reiterates politically conservative values. Both Mr Weasley and Mr Dursley are breadwinners married to housewives. Even in the magical world the highest seats of power are occupied by men. The leading male and female characters, Harry and Hermione, fall into the typical gender roles, one being the physically active male the other the relatively physically passive female. Even these and other gender differences (like Hermione's superior intelligence) are based on biological differences that tend to distinguish the sexes in their juvenile years.

The Dursley and Weasley households are both typical of the old fashioned and nearly extinct First World families with housewives and male breadwinners. This bit of non-realism might be calculated to appeal to the desires of the children who are Rowling's target audience. Nevertheless, Hogwarts aims to create women capable of joining the magical work-force, and this too, paradoxically, will appeal to the ambitions of young female children. It is hard to say whether such paradoxes were deliberately designed by the author to highlight the contradiction within popular values, but it seems likely because the author was, at the time of writing the series, a highly educated, employable, mother.

The Dursley household is very patriarchal, for Mrs Dursley hardly speaks. The Weasley household is less obviously patriarchal. Molly Weasley has common Muggle household appliances and an "old radio

next to the sink” (*TCOS* 31). This is to be expected because Mr Weasley loved collecting Muggle things. However, Mrs Weasley strongly disapproves of her husband’s passion for collecting Muggle things. This raises the question of why she has Muggle things in her kitchen. Either she has a secret fetish for technology or the patriarchy survives in the Weasley household.

Women holding professional jobs are also in the 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 many similar dismissals of rather irrelevant criticism, that a correction is forthcoming is highly doubtful. Not only would such corrections seem arbitrary, they would not actually correct a mistake, for obviously Rowling’s has taken pains to create a realistic world rather than an idealistic fantasy world, and she has done so in a way calculated to raise questions about reality.

Perhaps 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 idealised and adorable. But even *Dumbledore*’s actions and words are the product of a belief that children are capable of learning their own lessons if they are left to their own devices. This philosophy might not reflect Rowling’s personal philosophy, but it does reiterate popular First World ideas and practices of raising children. Hannah Arendt noted this change in

pedagogy in her essay “What is Authority?” There she wrote 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). Rowling’s critical response to this trend of trusting the desires of children and of reducing the role of authority, is treated in Chapter Four’s discussion of Harry’s moral and intellectual faculties.

#### vi. The Ideal Consumer

Any discussion of satire and parody in *HP* should touch on Rowling’s scathingly satirical portrait of the Dursleys. Like Rowling’s reactionary religious critics, the Dursley’s are terrified of witchcraft and wizardry, and Mr Vernon Dursley does not approve of imagination (*TPS* 10).

However, the Dursleys are never identified as a religious family, and – their treatment of Harry excluded – they seem like a typical secular family, just the kind that might buy Rowling’s books. They are typical consumers, and they buy young Dudley every food and form of entertainment he desires. Dudley consumes food endlessly, and enjoys television shows like *The Great Humberto*. Humberto is probably a magician or about a superhero with magical powers, and so would be very much like Harry Potter. Dudley also enjoys “blowing up ... aliens on his computer” (35), which really is not very different from the

violence we find in Harry Potter. Finally, “*Don’t ask questions* – that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys” (TPS 20): ironically, this is probably also the rule with most of Rowling’s readers. In short, her portrait of the Dursleys satirises her own readers, or at least the readers whose relationship to her books is comparable to Dudley’s relationship to food and entertainment.

#### vii. Conclusion

The close resemblance between the magical world and the real world in Rowling’s works makes them very different from the magical worlds found in the works of Tolkien, Le Guin, Lewis, and others. To facilitate this difference Rowling could not set her magical world in another world entirely, or even in a world resembling medieval Europe. Rowling had to set her fantasy world in a contemporary and developed nation, England. This chapter shows that most of the images generated by the action at Hogwarts were derived from images of our modern world, and that those images reiterate many of our modern secular values, but do so in a parodic and critical manner.

**- CHAPTER TWO -**

**Christian Images and Ideas**

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). In *Harry Potter* there is much borrowing from previous authors, and often the borrowing is parodic. For example, 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 Hallowe’en accessory (*TCOS* 100). Rowling’s extensive borrowing from Lewis tends to parody because she distorts Lewis’ Christian images and ideas by forcing them into her secular work. The same holds true of Rowling’s extensive use of the Judea-Christian tradition, particularly the Bible, and this shall be the topic of this chapter: any reference to Rowling’s tendency to secularise religious thought also means *her tendency to parody*.



## ii. Harry's Birth and Childhood

On the first page of the first book Rowling both invokes the life of Christ and attempts to differentiate her young hero from Christ. In deliberate contrast to the rare meteorological event that accompanied Christ'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 explicitly describing the mundane circumstances of Harry's arrival Rowling invokes Christ's birth and marks her version as an intentional secularisation of the Christian version.

On the other hand, Rowling also wants to appeal to our weakness for magic, and so it seems the cloudy sky marking Harry's arrival only veiled a number of truly strange meteorological events. Indeed, above the clouds there are "[s]hooting stars all over Britain" (11), and many owls appear in broad daylight, and a half-giant Hagrid flies on 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 an ordinary man and woman, 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). Christ's fatal sacrifice imparts the power of grace

upon mankind, and he dies because his friend, the disciple Judas, betrayed him. In this case it is Harry's parents who play Christ's role, and this secularises Christ's death and resurrection because they do not resurrect, and the power they give Harry is not potential immortality.

The visit of the three gift-bearing wise men to the new-born Christ is also altered by Rowling. Shortly after Harry's birth three wise persons visit him, and they are Dumbledore (the Headmaster of Hogwarts), McGonagall (a professor), and Hagrid (he will later teach students how to care for magical creatures). However, whereas in the Gospel story the wise men deliver gifts to the new-born Christ, Rowling's wise persons deliver the saviour Harry to his uncle and aunt.

The fact that Harry must be raised by relatives also bears resemblance to the story of Christ, for Christ's true father was the Father in Heaven, and Joseph, like Mr Dursley, is only a stepfather. Similarly, *Narnia* begins with the story of an orphan raised by an uncle who is a magician. Rowling's version secularises the Gospel story and inverts Lewis' Christian revision. However, if Lewis' story was meant as a Christian allegory then Rowling's anti-allegorical version also secularises Lewis' version.

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 able 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)

This means that Harry alone is qualified to perform a kind of harrowing of Hell, or rather a purging of Muggle-bloods from the magical world. Christ is supposed to be related to King David, and by virtue of being his descendent he fulfils Jewish prophecies about the genealogy of the Messiah and is destined to purify rather than purge the damned. Christ's genealogy is equally obscure, for it uncertain how Christ's bloodline can be legitimately traced through a stepfather, Joseph.

### iii. Voldemort, Death, and Blood

Let us consider the chief antagonist in *HP*, Voldemort, and then his conflict with Harry. A prime example of borrowing from the Judeo-Christian tradition is Voldemort's unspeakable name. For the ancient Hebrews, and still in Hebrew Bibles, it is forbidden to say or write God's name. In *HP* no one except Harry and Dumbledore seem able to

pronounce “Voldemort.” In Lewis’ series the reference to Judaism is less parodic; there the White Witch cannot bear to hear anyone pronounce the name of the Christ-like, God-like, Aslan (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* 112).

The last four letters of Voldemort’s name, ‘mort,’ 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, and from the old English spelling of old, ‘olde.’ Thus ‘Voldemort’ could mean ‘the one who wills death,’ or ‘the old death.’ Judging from Voldemort’s ways, and from the fear he instils, the old death is a terrible death. This death contrasts with Dumbledore’s death, which is just a “great adventure” (*TPS* 215). And this theme of the old and new, and this idea of having two deaths, have a precedent in Revelation, chapters 20 and 21.

Voldemort’s attempt to wipe out Harry’s father’s bloodline is Rowling’s secular version of the Old Testament story of the attempt to wipe out Ahab’s bloodline (2 Kings 9:8). This desire to eliminate Muggle-blood from Hogwarts also seems like a sinister parody of the Jewish interest in making Jewish blood a prerequisite for Jewish children.

During Voldemort’s attempt to kill the new-born Harry, Harry’s mother sacrifices herself to protect her son (*TCOS* 233), and this sacrifice bestows upon Harry the power to withstand Voldemort’s power. Thus, in a reversal of gender roles, the secular saviour receives

his power from the mother, for in the Judeo-Christian tradition the religious saviour receives his power from the Father.

Rowling also provides a secular version of Christ's greatest act – his victory over death through resurrection – for Harry's greatest act is his victory over *Voldemort*, a victory which, unlike Christ's victory, is not guaranteed to be eternal.

Furthermore, Harry's mission is radically different than Christ's. Harry does not come to deliver mankind from sin and death; he comes only to deliver the magical world from a very limited sense of death, the 'olde death or the fearful death associated with *Voldemort*. He does not come to heal and to give immortal life; indeed, part of his mission is to prevent *Voldemort* from acquiring full and immortal life. He does this partly by preventing *Voldemort* from acquiring the "*the philosopher's Stone, a legendary substance [which] produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal*" (TPS 161).

Harry's mission to conquer the fear of death rather than physical death is evident in Chapter Six of *TPOA*. Hagrid tries to persuade his students to overcome their fear of the vicious-looking Hippogriff Buckbeak by bowing before the beast. Harry is the first to make a successful bow before the beast, and in doing so he rejects Christ's refusal to bow to the beast whom Christians call "Satan" (Mat. 4:9).

According to Catholic tradition the blood of Christ imparts upon the faithful forgiveness from sin and freedom from death; according to

Firenze the “blood of at a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price” (*TPS* 188). This extended life is given indiscriminately, and so Voldemort uses it to extend his life.

Furthermore, in a reversal of Christian symbolism, it is the body of Voldemort’s father, given in ignorance, that renews the son’s life: “*Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!*” (*TGOF* 556).

And in the Christian tradition Christ’s sacrificial body gives life to all who believe in him, but in “Flesh, Blood and Bone” we find this inversion, “*B-blood of the enemy . . . forcibly taken . . . you will . . . resurrect your foe*” (*TGOF* 557).

Harry hears Voldemort seeking blood (*TCOS* 105), and we’ve good reason to believe Voldemort wants Harry’s blood. Christ offers his blood to his believers. Again, Rowling has inverted the moral order, for Harry’s blood seems useful only as a means to prolonging Voldemort’s life.

In “Cornelius Fudge” the Easter holidays seem to arrive, but we encounter none of the religious or secular images normally associated with Easter. Neither Christ’s death and resurrection (the Christian basis for Easter) nor bunnies and eggs (the secular signs of Easter) are mentioned. However, immediately prior to mentioning Easter holidays (*TCOS* 186) we learn that the Mandrakes in Greenhouse Three are almost mature, and that when they are mature they shall “revive those poor people in the hospital wing.” Thus resurrecting is replaced by its closest secular alternative, reviving. However, the four people to be

revived really are dead unless Rowling intended that we interpret their literally petrified state as a symbol for an emotionally petrified state, a state caused by fear of death. If that is the case then the Mandrakes only serve to revive consciousness. This reading of the word 'revive' agrees with Rowling's secular beliefs, and agrees with the parodic nature of the chapter's title, "Cornelius Fudge." This refers to the fact that, according to the Bible a Cornelius was the first Gentile to believe in the resurrection, and 'to fudge' means to be dishonest, so "Cornelius Fudge" associates lying with Christianity. The connection between the biblical Cornelius and the Rowlian Cornelius is strengthened by their work: the former is a centurion, an enforcer of the law, and the latter is the Minister of Magic, a man who also enforces the law. Lastly, Cornelius Fudge's surname also denotes a form of chocolate, which is a popular secular Easter-holiday indulgence, and this connection of Cornelius to food also has biblical precedent, for Peter interprets for Cornelius his vision about forbidden foods before he teaches Cornelius about the resurrection (Acts 10).

#### iv. In The Beginning and In The End

*Harry Potter* contains some very close parodies of the Bible's first, last, and prophetic books. What we know about the Whomping Willow suggests that it was designed as a parody of the tree of the Forbidden

Fruit in Genesis. The Whomping Willow could be part of the Forbidden Forest at Hogwarts, certainly 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, but Rowling does not associate the forbidden with any sort of knowledge which will cause death; learning to know death, as we shall see, is precisely what Harry is bidden to do. The centrality of death also invokes the theme of grief, as grief is the common response to knowledge of death, and grief is associated with weeping, and this reminds me of the weeping willow, of which the cruel Whomping Willow is an inversion. Although the Whomping Willow seems more like a tree that will cause weeping than one that will weep, this makes it more like the Forbidden Fruit. Moreover, if grief and weeping imply a capacity for sympathy it is worth noting that the Whomping Willow was planted precisely because Dumbledore was sympathetic towards a werewolf (*TPOA* 258). Towards a werewolf? This seems *ridiculous*, even satirical, and it is, but it is also meaningful once we consider that Lupin, the werewolf, teaches the *riddikulus* or comical method as a means to overcoming fear. As a teacher of comedy, even of parody, Lupin is associated with the deepest meaning of Rowling’s work, a level which has been hidden just as the secret entrance to Hogwarts was hidden by the Whomping Willow.



Voldemort has his Dark Mark like some neon sign over the world, and 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 at the time the book was written completing his 666<sup>th</sup> 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, whereas in the Christian tradition eternal life is good, not 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). These names were probably derived from Gog and Magog, names associated with a people against whom Ezekiel prophesies in chapter 38 and 39. Rowling’s version satirises Ezekiel, because in the latter the forces of Gog and Magog are evil, whereas for Rowling spiders, and hence Gog and Magog, are associated with irrational fears.

The title “The Writing on the Wall” (*TCOS* ch.9) refers verbatim to Daniel chapter five, 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 by Harry are the

words “The Chamber has been opened,” but we find three other words also on the wall of the girls’ toilet, and those words are “Out of Order” (118). This is important because in Daniel 5 the three mysterious words Mene, Tekel, and Parsin are written on the king’s wall. Another parallel is that in Daniel a dismembered hand appears and writes, and in *HP* “Hermione’s hand was waving in the air” (113) (Note that ‘Hermione’ is derived from the Greek messenger god Hermes, and this derivation loosely connects Hermione to the act of writing). Furthermore, magicians are present in both Daniel and *TCOS*. Both chapters 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 of Daniel is parodic because she associates its mysterious words, and by extension the divine mystery, with the vulgar ‘mystery’ of excretion, urination, and female reproductive organs.

Sometimes Rowling supplements textual parallels with numerical parallels. Chapter Ten (“The Marauder’s Map”) of *TPOA* refers to Chapter Ten of Revelation. In the latter chapter John receives a scroll and hears the voices of the seven thunders. In Rowling’s tenth chapter is 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,” 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, just as the angel who gave the scroll “swore by him who lives for ever and ever” (10:6) so one of the boys who gave Harry the Map says “*I solemnly swear that I am up to no good*” (143).

Using the same books Rowling again supplemented textual parallels with numerical parallels. In chapter one of Revelation “the seven spirits” are mentioned, 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 Harry receives four letters, one note, and one newspaper clipping. The missing seventh document might be represented by the paragraph from Harry’s textbook *A History of Magic*, 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 is the following: “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 Christ 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 again uses the first-is-the-last pattern in *TGOF*, whose last chapter is titled “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 the Gospels

The title “The Unforgivable Curses” (*TGOF* ch.14) might refer to the Old Testament condemnation of they who take God’s name in vain; but a more like derivation lies in the Gospels. There Jesus says, “every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven” (Matt. 12:31). Strangely, the expression “unforgivable curses(s)” is not used in Rowling’s narrative, and this raises the question: why did Rowling allude to Christianity, specifically to the four Gospels, in her title? Perhaps for no other reason but to help us locate the following parody of the Gospels: the parody is this: whereas Christ condemns people who blaspheme the Spirit, in “The Unforgivable Curses” the said curses are uttered against animals, namely spiders, which are hardly symbols of the Spirit. Rowling’s parody continues with Moody: in her version the curser rather than the cursed is ‘Moody.’ This is parodic 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 perhaps no other action more than Judas' kiss is responsible for Christ's death. However, Judas' kiss is only responsible for Christ'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 secular purposes. Thus in *Harry Potter* the soul is not the seat of life, for she 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). The problem that Rowling, or at least Lupin, encounters in appropriating the soul concept into secular materialistic thought is that 'memory' and 'sense' are attributed to the soul instead of to the brain. Perhaps Rowling, by letting a man named 'Lupin' use a religious word like 'soul' she meant to associate religion with 'loopy' thinking. This pun is not

frivolous, for after all Lupin was a werewolf and was moved to 'lunacy' by the 'lunar' cycles.

In *TCOS* Harry flies in a car "past swirls and turrets of snowy cloud" (57). In the Gospels we read that "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). Harry hears voices that permit him to prophesy the future, and Christ also prophesies. However, whereas biblical prophets are the mouth-pieces of God, the terrible voices in Harry's head seem to belong to Voldemort, and are really foreshadowed when Voldemort was actually 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 Christ. To parody Christ's marks of the nails driven through him Harry's forehead is marked by "[a] curiously-shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning" (17). Christ's stigmata were caused by the events that led to his death, Harry's stigmata was caused by Voldemort.

A more curious parallel between Christ and Harry is their refusal to obey established authority. Christ calls the religious authorities hypocrites (Matt. 23:3); when he is interrogated by the Sanhedrin Christ rebuffs their judicial authority (Luke 22); when the chief priests, scribes and elders ask him, "by what authority are you doing these things?" (Mark 11:28) Christ answers with a question; and when Pilate asks if he is "King of the Jews" Christ responds with a mocking "You say so"

(Mark 15:2). Although Harry rarely lets authorities hear his lack of respect for them, he does constantly break the rules established and enforced by authorities. Similarly, Christ often transgresses the established law of his time, the Mosaic code. He works on the Sabbath, and his whole mission seems to be to replace the primacy of the law with a primacy of faith, love, and charity. Arguably most of Harry's transgressions of the rules enforced at Hogwarts and by the Ministry of Magic are as often motivated by anger as by love.

Christ 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). Since serpents are traditionally identified by Christians as symbols of the demonic, this parallel indicates no difference between Harry and Christ. The difference only emerges when we consider Rowling's strong hints that Harry really is a serpent and a Slytherin. In contrast, the Gospels contain no evidence that the Lamb of God was not Jewish, or not of the tribe of Judah.

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

Other parallels between Christ and Harry include their words and actions towards their enemies. Christ 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). The difference is that Jesus spares his enemies knowing that the price for this is his own death, a death he freely accepts. Even while hanging from the cross he does not ask his 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, when considering the dragons he must face, admits that he “wouldn’t have let his worst enemy face those monsters unprepared – well, perhaps Malfoy or Snape ...” (*TGOF* 298). The difference, then, between Christ and Harry, is very great, and this difference probably reflects the fact that Harry tries to live the philosophy of a secular writer. Consequently Harry has no hope of really surviving the death of the body, and therefore he sees little reason to be merciful towards his enemies, and he more often abandons speech



and resorts to violent action. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter Four, Harry becomes increasingly merciless towards his enemies.

#### vi. Love and Hatred

Another example of parody that is clearly the result of Rowling's secularising tendency is evident in Harry's concern with physical pain. Pictures of "people halfway through transforming into other people" cause Harry to hope that "the artist had imagined the looks of intense pain on their faces" (*TCOS* 124). In contrast, when Harry actually witnesses people suffering pain he never pities them, not even when his best friend, Ron, suffers. We could speculate that this element in Harry's portrait is either an ironic or a realistic representation of our youth, but in either case Rowling does not seem interested in presenting Harry as someone who cares about emotional pain. In contrast, many of Christ's actions and words, the Sermon on the Mount especially, address emotional pain.

Still Harry is hardly void of emotion, and outwardly he seems much more emotional than Christ. Undoubtedly Harry suffered much emotional pain at the hands of the Dursleys. In *TCOS* he exposes his strong emotions by remarking that "[I]t is not possible to live with the Dursleys and not hate them" (150). This comment might reflect a much more realistic vision of human nature than Christ's call to love our

enemies, and perhaps Harry's response is typical of abused children, but nevertheless, since we are dealing with a work of fantasy we must ask why Harry's emotions must be typical and realistic rather than exceptional and ideal? Lewis will insist that fantasy deals with real objects of fear and love, he does not exclude the possibility of presenting exceptional and yes unrealistic (in the sense of unusual) emotional responses to them. Perhaps Rowling's uninspired realism caters to readers who want to identify with a persecuted hero who does not make them feel disbelief, or a sense of inferiority. Readers might have either experience if Harry solved problems with words of wisdom, or acts of love, rather than with magical powers no human can possess.

Although Harry is certainly not a speaker of soul-guiding parables or aphorisms, he does perform life-saving actions. In the "second task" he saves the lives of Ron, Hermione, and Fleur's sister and in doing so he sacrifices points he might have earned. However, soon afterwards Harry realises that his good deed was wasted because the three lives mentioned were in no real danger. "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). Thus Rowling's story reduces one of Harry's decision to help others, and to risk his life and his points, to an act of stupidity. I take a negative view of this not because all attempts to help others should be praised regardless of the

context, but because here any suggestion of true heroism is trivialised by the fact that Harry's 'heroism' is part of an orchestrated quasi-sporting event.

Ron and Hermione help Harry get the Philosopher's Stone, Moody and Hermione help Harry with the first task, Dobby and Cedric help him with the second task, and together Cedric and Harry complete the third task. Harry never succeeds alone, whereas Christ typically works alone and always succeeds. Christ is abandoned by his friends, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and left to singly bear the guilt of all mankind. Harry's inability to succeed alone represents a more accurate portrait of the human condition, especially of the modern human condition, that being one in which endless networks of interaction between co-dependent specialists makes victory and happiness in solitude seem impossible. Outside of this stifling network we still have the frivolous victories of relatively independent athletic stars like Harry Potter. In other words, because Harry is the 'hero' in his very realistic and unheroic world, children easily identify with Harry. However, it remains to be proven that characters who afford easy identifications produce better effects than characters who inspire awe and amazement.

To conclude this chapter it is necessary to qualify what was said about Rowling's negative representation of pity and compassion. Harry initially does prefer to let his friends be sacrificed, and so in the first book he lets Ron sacrifice himself (205) and shortly afterward he lets

Hermione risk her life (208). However, by the third book Harry risks his life by bowing to the Hippogriff, and in the fourth book his love for Fleur's sister and for Cedric (544) inspire him to risk his life for them. However, Harry's love for the girl causes him to forget that Dumbledore would never wilfully endanger another life, and consequently the act of love was made in vain; and the risk he took to save Cedric was also made in vain, for Cedric died of his wounds. Equally cynical is the fact that simultaneous with Harry's increasing ability to perform acts of love is his increasing tendency to commit acts of violence (see Chapter Four).

Although Harry's mother's love provides Harry with "some protection forever" from the power of Voldemort (*TPS* 216), this power is very limited and all but gone in Harry's 14<sup>th</sup> year. But not only is his power limited, but it is a mixed blessing, for his power to survive Voldemort's touch also allows Voldemort to put some of his power into Harry (*TCOS* 245), and according to Chapter Four, make him like him. Finally, the price his mother pays for her act of love is death. All this does not present a very inspiring, Christian, or positive view of love, and if the theory propounded in the appended "Rowling's Conclusion" is correct, we cannot expect anything different from her future books.

## vii. Conclusion

Considering all this, Philip Christman's comment that "Rowling's story is a startlingly Christian one" (22) seems misguided, and Tucker's statement that her stories demonstrate "the power of love" (228) seems equally misguided. Rather, this and other chapters concur with the view that in *HP* "[w]e are watching ... an all out assault on biblical values and a Christian world view" ("Let Us Reason" 4).

## - CHAPTER THREE -

### **Nature and Technology**

#### i. Introduction

Rowling's cultural conservatism continues through her representations of Nature and technology. This chapter will show the extent to which the text expresses an anti-environmental value system. Unlike previous chapters, this one will make very little effort to suggest that this systemic and extreme anti-environmentalism represents a parodic act designed to awaken us to environmental issues.

#### ii. Technology and Nature Generally

In Lewis' *Narnia* one of the rare references to technology occurs on the last page, and it is not pleasant, for it tells us that *the* train accident was real and that it is responsible for the death of the entire Pevensie family. Rowling's *HP* series does the reverse. It abounds in images of technology; and, except in association with Dudley, it typically presents technology as harmless, necessary, or fun. For example, a motorbike falls from the sky without harming its rider; 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, drive an automobile, crash into the Whomping Willow, and emerge unscathed and unconcerned about the dangers inherent to this technology.

In contrast to Rowling's cute representations of technology, with few exceptions Nature is forbidden, dark, dangerous, and untrustworthy. By the third book we read that "Harry had had enough unpleasant experiences in [the Forbidden Forest] to last him a lifetime" (86). This trend of having bad experiences in the Forbidden Forest does not change. 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 his comfortable suburban home. When they arrive at their uncivilised destination the weather conditions are not hospitable: “icy 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. In short, the world beyond civilisation is a cold, lifeless, and inhospitable world, a world that has no value in itself, and is needed only as a last and desperate refuge from man-made problems. This is not unlike the typical western European vacationer, for whom Nature is an idyllic refuge from the stress of the modern life. Although Rowling’s scene is instructive because it suggests that this view of Nature is naïve, there is something to be said for taking a less polarised view of Nature and technology.

The case of the Whomping Willow and the Ford Anglia is typical of Rowling’s representations of Nature and technology. The Whomping Willow is one of Rowling’s most absurd creations. This very mobile or limber tree “was a very violent tree” (*TPOA* 136). It moves and guards a secret entrance to Hogwarts, an entrance used by the werewolf Lupin. The Whomping Willow apparently intentionally obstructed the movement of the Ford Anglia in order to prevent the boys from discovering the secret entrance and to prevent them from solving and stopping the murders at Hogwarts. This violent tree, rather than being a



romantic symbol of grief, like its namesake the weeping willow, seems instead to be the cause of grief.

In Chapter Fifteen of *TCOS* spiders are portrayed as a definite danger to human life. Aragog, the spider leader, cannot restrain his mob of spiders from being overpowered by the desire to eat Harry and Ron. Of course the boys are saved, but not by a bird or other natural predator of spiders, but by the Ford Anglia “thundering down the slope, headlamps glaring, its horn screeching, knocking spiders aside” (207). Scenes such as this would rightfully be exciting, even funny, if their humour and drama did not rely on our ignoring the reality that automobiles are a far more common source of death than spiders. We might defend Rowling on the basis that her misrepresentation of reality is funny precisely because it is a misrepresentation. However, I am not criticising Rowling’s ability to make a grim reality something light and frivolous, nor am I speaking as an extremist neo-Luddite. Certainly technology sometimes serves human needs better than untouched Nature. My criticism concerns the fact that Rowling is unfairly biased towards technology, for she rarely paints Nature with the lightness and humour she reserves for technology.

After Harry, Ron, and Hermione pass through the trapdoor they land on some “sort of plant thing” (*TPS* 201). Like the Whomping Willow, this plant thing is no friendly plant. The moment Hermione landed “the plant had started to twist *snakelike* tendrils around her ankles” and it

tries to suffocate her and her friends (203; italics mine). Afterwards birdlike creatures are hunted by Harry. 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. Thus 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.

Hagrid’s garden and pumpkin patch seem friendly enough. Unfortunately, his pumpkins are never associated with food, probably because vegetables hardly exist on the Hogwarts menu. When they are served are rarely eaten. Hagrid’s interest in growing pumpkins seems to be based on his desire to grow large pumpkins for *Hallowe’en* (*TCOS* 100). The argument that the act of eating vegetables just cannot provide interesting images for children’s fantasy is not persuasive. Vegetables that flee when we want to eat them are at least as interesting as vegetables that are so large you can sit in them for a day before throwing them in the garbage (*TCOS* 100).

A rare instance of a connection between living non-human things 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). But these are not natural frogs. Apparently frogs are not good enough to eat unless they are made of chocolate. This artificial relationship to Nature is common

in First World countries, and it reflects the value they place on personal health, and on consuming foods whose production requires far more energy than indigenous foods (in England rabbit stew can require very little investment of energy, but chocolate must be shipped to England from abroad, prepared and packaged in factories on nuclear power, etc.).

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 things any character in *Harry Potter* eats, but in all likelihood even a sprout-flavoured bean would provide none of the roughage and nutrients which the unprocessed vegetable could provide. Once again Rowling removes her readers far from the natural world, and moves the fantasy genre very close to our technophilic world.

In conjunction with the lack of images that reflect our alimentary dependence on Nature, Hagrid's garden is never explicitly sown, tended, or harvested. Instead his garden is only used to grow pumpkins that are not eaten and for a class gold-hunting lesson (*TGOF* 471-72). These artificial relationships with the garden perfectly conserves modern technological man's relationship to the Earth. In the words of Jacques Ellul, technological man is "[e]nclosed within his artificial creation" (*The Technological Society* 428).

The Hogwarts grounds includes 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. That the author consistently managed to avoid making real connections between the Earth and our daily health reflects our historical and continuing antipathy towards the Earth. 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 that stresses the superiority of a science that invents and prefers unnatural medicines over the science that uses natural medicines.

Rowling’s depiction of the Weasley garden supports our argument. Despite being owned by wizards, all of its contents, minus the gnome-pests, reflect 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 even boy wizards may not enter that popularly feminine gender territory.

The gnome-pests that Harry, Ron, and the twins work to remove from the Weasley garden are a variation of some common indigenous rodent. These rodent-like creatures live in holes and symbolise the natural food source of the weasel-like Weasleys. However, the Weasley boys, rather than eating the gnome-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, which isn’t entirely convincing. In conclusion, this chapter reflects a false and bourgeois relationship to the Earth. The pun on the Weasley name seems to hint at Rowling’s consciousness of the problem, but this might also be a bit of trivial irony.

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 previously he expressed much anger at the mere thought that he might lose his rat. Ron does not seem capable of dealing with the loss, and finds refuge in the consumerist philosophy that everything is disposable and replaceable.

Although domesticated animals seem to receive friendlier treatment from the author we should reconsider the nature of the sarcasm in Dumbledore's "*faithful* pets." 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 in the name of Hermione's cat *Crookshanks* should be enough to warn us about its loyalty. Concerning the great dog, namely Sirius Black, the semantic connection between this surname and Voldemort's title '*Dark Lord*' should raise questions about Black's loyalty to Harry. In short, even domestic animals do not present morally unambiguous figures. This is also true in books by Tolkien and Lewis, but for them this moral ambiguity is a product of the Fall, and it will be rectified in the new Heaven and the new Earth.

The interpretation of moral ambiguity might apply to all the characters in *HP*, and Sirius Black's name is especially instructive here. His name appears to have been derived from Lewis' names for the horses used by the forces of good and evil, respectively Coalblack and Snowflake. Sirius is a name for the Dog Star, and stars are often thought to have visual similarities to snowflakes, and 'Black' is in 'Coalblack'. In other words, Sirius Black is a kind of dark star. A further derivation takes us from Lewis's *Narnia* to Plato's *Paedrus*, where two horses attached to the soul symbolise 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.

### iii. Animal Abuse

Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, apparently knows nothing about the shy nature of owls or about their nocturnal ways and their 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 the foul weather to subside 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. If we blame Hagrid’s behaviour on his ‘sub’-human intellect we only raise the problem raised with reference to the elves, namely the problem of anthropocentrism.

“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 or pool 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 or Ron ever wonder about the ethics of 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 of these curses on a spider



and says to his students, “You’d like it, would you, if I did it to you?” (188). This sounds like Moody understands that his lesson on cursing is morally reprehensible, or that at least the lesson should not be practised on human beings. But Moody is not beyond treating any human being he suspects of evil with the same degree of cruelty as he treats animals, although he prefers to turn 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 asks what he is doing Moody responds that he is teaching a lesson. McGonagall is outraged while Ron cherishes the moment and Hermione and Harry laugh about it. Afterwards only Hermione feels concern for Malfoy.

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. But perhaps this is being too harsh. After all, frivolous magic 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). But appearances can be deceiving. Rowling’s frivolous transformations *resemble* the kind of magic represented by Alice walking through a looking glass, which is magic that appeals to our “longing for [we] know not what” (Lewis 236). However, in reality

people who transform living animals into things like snuff-boxes know exactly what they long for, they long for things like snuff-boxes, and perhaps also for a sense of power over Nature.

Rowling conserves the images and ideology of modern science by creating distinct allusions to animal experimentation and genetic engineering, as we already saw in the previous paragraph. We also discover that Hogwarts students sometimes create deformed things or transform healthy living things into things that cannot survive. Hermione's transfiguration act creates a "tortoise [that] looked more like a turtle" (*TPOA* 233). A single guinea-fowl is transformed into several guinea-pigs, but "Neville's guinea-pig still had feathers" (*TGOF* 336). Furthermore, throughout the series animals are vivisected, desiccated, and their bodies or parts stored or hung from ceilings. At no point does Rowling suggest that environmentally conservative principles are being applied and that the magicians are doing their best to fully utilise whatever they kill. In *TGOF* Neville has "been made to disembowel a barrel-ful of horned toads" (185) and Rowling provides no reason for this chore other than Snape's need to punish Neville.

In *TPS* we find Hagrid trying to satisfy the monstrous appetite of his newborn baby Norwegian Ridgeback dragon by feeding it "rats by the crate" (*TPS* 173). This is very comical. Still, consider the environmental consequences of setting loose a species imported from Scandinavia into Britain. This importation of a Ridgeback dragon alludes to those

environmentally disastrous imports we make with increasing frequency. 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). Admittedly we are dealing with fantasy, but still it is odd that so many real modern ‘sins’ so closely resemble scenes in Rowling’s works. And, although the act alludes to a modern reality, the lack of consequences does not, and their absence conserves the popular belief in our right to severely alter the environment.

The theme of birth, or at least of child-rearing, is treated with more disrespect for the natural process. We learn that 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 the eggs of nesting mothers (288), but it reflects Harry’s insulated conscience, and he remains ignorant of the cruelty he participates in. Harry even foolishly remarks that his dragon is “*too protective of her eggs*” (310; italics mine). 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 this acquisition.

#### iv. Environmentally Deprecating Language

We now leave the subject of environmentally ignorant scenes to discuss the rich subject of environmentally deprecating language. In *Harry Potter* popular and conventional stereotypes about animals are used to insult human beings. We typically think this is funny or clever; sometimes we protest that the insults are unfair towards the unfortunate human recipients of the insults; the following analysis will show that these stereotypes and insults equally misrepresent the animals.

Rowling writes of young Dudley, “his piggy little eyes [were] fixed on the [television] screen and his five chins wobbling as he ate continuously” (*TPOA* 18). This insult employs the popular stereotype of pigs as excessive eaters. Like most stereotypes, this one is not based on reality. Pigs, like most creatures, will only eat too much if held captive and overfed; in their natural state animals, even in the presence of abundant food, rarely if ever suffer from obesity. The stereotype not only reiterates popular values, it shows a lack of compassion for the obese Dudley, and it shows a lack of understanding of Nature. To be truthful any comparison of Dudley’s appetite to a pig’s must be intended to illustrate the fact that Dudley is an innocent victim of civilisation.

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’s says “[i]f you made a better rat than

human, it's not much to boast about, Peter." This is an ignorant comment, and not only because pride and boasts are not virtues, but because it expresses pride and ignorance by suggesting that human beings should be better than rats. Human beings might be higher in the food chain and they might be "of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7), but Jesus balanced this view by making Nature an example to be imitated (Luke 12:27), and truly even rats probably fulfil their role on Earth better than humans do.

In *TPS* we find the words "Uncle Vernon made another funny noise, like a mouse being trodden on" (40). Even if Rowling avoided the inappropriate suggestion of comedy because by 'funny' she meant 'strange,' this is still a weak adjective to describe Vernon's intense pain. By comparing Vernon's pain threshold to that of a little mouse Rowling also risks misrepresenting mice by suggesting that they are too sensitive. Indeed, we always risk misrepresenting something when we insult someone by comparing them to what has no true relation to the thing insulted, and this risk is one more reason not to engage in verbal abuse.

Elsewhere 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). Christ called Herod "that fox"

and warned against ‘wolves,’ but he validated the ‘carnivore’s’ role by himself becoming the sacrificial lamb.

Hagrid calls Uncle Vernon “yeh great prune” (*TPS* 40). Uncle Vernon compares insane people to dogs by calling them barking and howling mad (68). The narrator compares the angry and verbose Hermione’s actions 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). Ron calls Professor Trelawney an “ugly old bat” (*TGOF* 325). Pansy Parkinson expresses her anthropocentric view of beauty by screaming, “*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. These insults might be conventional; they are not for that reason justified or intelligent. Certainly it is a poor use of language’s potential for poetic expression to exclusively use nature-images for insults.

Rowling also uses conventional stereotypes of evil to describe Voldemort, whose hands are like “large, pale spiders” and his pupils are “like a cat’s” (*TGOF* 559). Stereotypes such as these do conserve present popular values; evidence that Rowling might be parodying these stereotypes is difficult to find. She does occasionally undermine them, for example by attributing snake-like qualities to Harry, but it is

doubtful that the moral ambiguity this creates is preferable to the black-and-white moral world represented by popular stereotypes.

A still untouched trope of environmentally deprecating and stereotypical images exists in Rowling's names for characters. One of Harry's enemies is 'Crabbe,' a name evoking a crab-like image. Another enemy is Goyle, whose name is apparently derived from *gargoyle*, a non-human creature. (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*.) The morally ambiguous Snape has a name resembling *snake*. The Hogwarts house to which the hero belongs is named after a pagan supernatural creature, the griffin; in contrast, Harry's enemies belong to the house of 'Slytherin,' a name that evokes serpentine movements.

Another category of environmentally deprecating images includes scenes wherein angry wizards turn their enemies into animals, as if to say that being an animal is by nature deprecating and horrible. 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).

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.

One last stereotype to address is the one we have of snakes. Predictably, in *HP* snakes are associated with the bad team, the Slytherins, and with evil Voldemorte. In *TCOS* a snake is provoked to anger by Lockhart and prepares to strike (145). After Harry subdues the snake using parseltongue his witnesses fear he will "sprout fangs or spit poison" (157). However, although Rowling draws more 'dark' associations around the snake than around other animals, despite this strong stereotyping, or perhaps to intentionally blur the strong typing that divides good from evil, Rowling also attributes a snake-like quality to Harry. Thus Harry speaks the language of snakes, and he has other qualities that make him a good candidate for the Slytherin team (*TCOS* 245), and Harry identifies with a snake when he expresses sympathy for the snake in the zoo (*TPS* 23). Nevertheless, snakes are overwhelmingly portrayed as evil things, and we are not asked to feel sympathy for snakes, not even for the snake that seems to live in Hogwarts' sewer pipes.



*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 passage, in addition to confirming the snake stereotype, alludes to the Gospels. In the above passage a monstrous snake will flee “*only from the crowing of the rooster*” (215), in the Bible the crowing of the rooster follows Peter’s loss of faith and caused him to flee from Christ. But Rowling’s substitution of a snake for Peter may not be entirely heretical, for Christ says to Peter, “Get behind me Satan!” (Matt. 16:23). This connection between evil and Peter is exaggerated by Rowling’s evil Peter Pettigrew, servant of Voldemort. Pettigrew’s surname is also a play on ‘pedigree,’ which invokes the theme of pureblood, her arch-villain Voldemort’s obsession.

The rooster, then, appears to be one of the few animals associated with benevolent powers. And this, as hinted earlier, is an ironic quality in this secular book because the rooster was once a symbol for the resurrected Christ, or the Second Christ, into whose role Rowling has placed Harry Potter.

In terms of environmental values, how is Harry, as false Christ, different from the first? The true Christ prophesies that anyone who believes his good news will not fear serpents, but will “pick up snakes with their hands” (Mark 16:18). The false Christ, Harry, commands them to be harmless (*TCOS* 145). The difference seems slight if we do not keep in mind that one works miracles by faith, and the other seeks control over Nature by means of magic. Christ called the fishermen away from their physical work that they might focus on the Word; Harry does not call the magicians and witches away from their environmentally destructive work, and he seems quite unaware of the spiritual potential of words.

#### v. Exceptions to the Anti-Environmental Trend

Ironically, perhaps the most naturally fearsome creature in *HP*, the 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 armed with ink, and by its connection to comedy (the twins and tickling), and being a secretive beast, symbolises the author.

A rare exception to Rowling’s negative representation of the vegetable world is her representation of the Mandrake. In Harry’s magical world the Mandrake is an antidote to the very essence of the fairy and fantasy

genre, magic. Assuming that magic represents unnatural powers, the Mandrake's opposition to this power makes it symbolic of Nature generally. The fact that the name 'Mandrake' hints at a connection to the evil Malfoy, whose first name is Draco, suggests that Rowling associated the forces of 'evil' with pro-environmentalism. This identification agrees with the connection Rowling makes between the colour green and Voldemort and the house of Slytherin, green being a common symbol for environmental parties.

A rare instance of Harry expressing pity for animals occurs when Harry finds a domestic cat literally *petrified*. Harry says, "Shouldn't we try and help –" (*TCOS* 106). Ron does not let Harry finish because he thinks they must flee the scene; but Harry's feelings of pity have already made it too late to flee. Again, as we saw in the previous chapter, compassion and love have negative consequences. This tendency probably either reflects Rowling's opinion that compassion pointless. Scenes such as the one last mentioned possibly conserves the value we place on the partial suppression of compassion, without which our culture cannot exist, and which Eliot described as "our hygienic morality in the interest of efficiency" (18). On the other hand, it could reflect the author's negative opinion about the usefulness of compassion in general.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Rowling's work expresses culturally conservative values with respect to the environment, there

are reasons to suspect that Rowling knows those values are not good values. In the middle of her projected middle book, in the chapter titled “The House-Elf Liberation Front,” the narrator comments that perhaps the dragon-like Skrewts “did not appreciate being forced into pillow-lined boxes and nailed in” (*TGOF* 321). Not coincidentally this rare environmentally-friendly remark occurs in a chapter whose title contains the word ‘Elf’ and the initials of this chapter contain the letters ELF. By no coincidence ELF is the acronym for the environmentally active Earth Liberation Front, and this organisation was founded in Britain, Rowling’s own land of citizenship.

Love and compassion are not merely felt, but are actually shown by several characters towards Hagrid’s Hippogriff. Unfortunately the Hippogriff is not a natural creature. In the context of so much evidence of cruelty towards animals, the fact that the Hippogriff is not a true animal seems like a deliberate move on Rowling’s part, and might constitute a criticism of popular love for unnatural things (both technological and religious) and disrespect for Nature.

There is good reason to believe that before being corrupted at Hogwarts Hagrid was an animal rights activist. In *TCOS* we learn that a young Hagrid “opened the Chamber of Secrets”, a chamber which contained a spider with “razor-sharp pincers” (184). This same spider, namely Aragog, was so glad to be free that he and his descendants became Hagrid’s friends. But the author makes no explicit connection

between the unnamed spider's freedom and Aragog's life in the forest, and consequently young readers can easily overlook the fact that Hagrid was punished for freeing the spider, that is, for being an environmental activist.

Ironically, the one part of Nature that Harry, if not the narrator, struggles to understand and accurately represent, is death. This seems ironic because death is the end of our awareness of Nature, the end of all representations of Nature. Harry tries to learn that he must come to terms with death, especially the death of his parents. Ron also struggles with death-as-fact-of-life. Ron fears Hermione's cat will eat his rat, and Hermione blandly remarks that "All cats chase rats, Ron!" (*TPOA* 111)

On the other hand, many facts of human biology, like procreation and excretion, are entirely absent, kept hidden, as it were, in the *chamber of secrets*. And yet, here again there are allusions or parodies of such natural processes as sexuality and puberty. For example, the scenes in which animals multiply by magic, living animals are born from Ron's mouth, hair appears on Hermione's face, pimples appear on her hands, and Harry walks with a boneless appendage. The fact that sexual and excretory imagery is so heavily suppressed partly agrees with Rowling's reiteration of popular values, although, this characteristic is typical of children's fantasy literature.

## vi. Conclusion

The intense anti-environmental theme 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 Christ'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 insult parts of Nature. Rowling's representations of Nature also depart from the examples set by Lewis Carroll and C.S. Lewis, for whom animals were often, if not always, the mouthpieces of riddles and wisdom. C.S. Lewis' pro-environmental themes (like saving trees) in the *Chronicles of Narnia* seem most remote from Harry's world. Rowling's depictions of Nature also contrast strongly with the beautiful and awe-inspiring Nature found in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Her depictions are also very different from the environmental pessimism of *Wind in the Willows*, in which toad's obsession with technology seems incurable.

Is this only a superficial assessment of Rowling's work? One cannot argue on the basis of the scant evidence found in "Exceptions to the Anti-Environmental Trend" that *HP* has anything like a strong environmental undercurrent; indeed, Rowling violates all environmental values and fully conserves anti-environmental values. Consequently, Rowling's work does not belong to the genre Tolkien called fairy-stories. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories" he speaks with contempt of technology

and he claims that all good “fairy-stories deal largely ... with simple or fundamental things [meaning ‘Nature’]” (75). Tolkien also claimed 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). But, as was hinted in the introduction, it is possible to read the sheer enormity of Rowling’s inversion of the pro-environmental theme as a deliberate and critical provocation. This would redeem the series, but it is doubtful that this method will be more effective in communicating pro-environmental values. The movie *Natural Born Killers* used the same tactic; it tried to critique senseless violence by exaggerating it, and apparently all for nought.

## - CHAPTER FOUR -

### **Hare-brained Solutions and Harry's Brain**

#### i. Introduction

*Harry Potter* is replete with such temporary corrective solutions to interpersonal problems as physical violence, magical violence, insults, and prison justice. Rowling's liberal use of these solutions, are closely related to images of real and virtual violence, real prisons, and real technological violence. As Tucker remarked without noting its connection to the real violent solutions used by *HP* characters, "The game of Quidditch could come straight from any video arcade" (231). In fact, in Rowling's work the forces of good make liberal and extreme use of these solutions, and this alone could be interpreted as evidence of some cynical parody of the norm in children's fantasy literature. In addition to this, there exists more concrete evidence of parody and criticism which shall be explored in this chapter.

#### ii. The Normalisation and Criticism of Injustice



Perhaps one reason why the issue of injustice in *HP* can easily be eclipsed by the issue of witchcraft and Satanism is that the injustices committed in *HP* closely resemble the injustices we witness, watch, or learn about daily, and have by sheer exposure have desensitised us to them. Like many Christian and humanitarian readers, even the idealistic Hermione rarely reflects on the unjust violence and suffering she witnesses. Even in her magical world preventative solutions to violence and crime neither exist nor are considered. She believes that crime must be punished, not prevented, and that in the most impersonal way possible. Thus, when Harry desires personal revenge against Sirius Hermione dissuades him by saying, “There’s nothing you can do! ... The Dementors will catch Black and he’ll go back to Azkaban” (*TPOA* 159). A more environmental or holistic approach to justice is not on the horizon. Justice, in reality and in Harry’s world, consists of considering only the immediate agent of crime. We simplify life by tearing the immediate agent of crime out of its social context, and then we effect the instant solution by physically removing the agent from society. Harry also supports this solution. He says, “He [Black] can go to Azkaban ... just don’t kill him” (275). Even *Dumbledore* does not have a more thoughtful alternative. Although he says “[t]he consequences of our actions are always so complicated, so diverse” (311) he seems unaware that the causes are also complicated and

diverse, and that just blaming the immediate agent of a crime is simplistic.

When Hermione became 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). Nietzsche, whose philosophy Rowling’s seems to echo, said concerning vengeance: “To desire revenge and then to carry out revenge means to be the victim of a vehement attack of fever which then, however, passes” (sec.60). Nietzsche then cautions us against vengeful fevers by praising the ability “to wait” (sec. 61) and by mocking people who exaggerate insults (62), and by criticising the modern justice system for being cruel and simplistic (66, 70). But Rowling also critiques the justice system. She does this by telling us that prisoners in Azkaban frequently lose their minds, and by suggesting that the primary function of the guards is to suck happiness out of the prisoners. To imply that even magical prisons are slightly useless, Fudge, the minister of justice, says “most of the prisoners in there sit muttering to themselves [but Black is] merely bored” (155).

Additional evidence of an underlying critique of the justice system is the fact that during the series everyone who is imprisoned is either imprisoned unjustly, will be an escapee, or is unknown. Sirius Black and Hagrid are unjustly imprisoned; Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew escape. The legal trials witnessed by Harry through the Pensieve do not reflect well on the legal process (see *TGOF* 509-518). 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. These facts do not describe a parody of the justice system we know because they are simply too realistic; but this realism highlights the worst aspects of our justice system, and in that sense they seem calculated to be critical.

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. The Hippogriff barely harms Malfoy after being insulted by him, but Malfoy's complaint suffices to condemn the beast to death. Perhaps irony exists in the fact that Harry, Ron and Hermione do more to try to save the beast than they do to save any human. Perhaps the fact that this beast is supernatural means that Rowling intended its dependence on humans as a critique of all ideas of the supernatural. This reading that the particular in poetry has universal implications agrees with Aristotle's belief that poetry, in contrast to history, is about universals (*Poetics* 11).

Other easily overlooked images of unjust violence are the acts of violence committed during the Quidditch matches. As in real 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. That they fail is instructive; it is only a pity that the same lesson is not taught as clearly with respect to the story’s ‘real’ action.

Superficially speaking, the Weasley twins’ failure to use magic to cheat their way into the Triwizard Tournament presents a critique of unjust uses of magic. No sooner does their magical trick enable them to cross the line around the Goblet of Fire then they are “hurled out of the golden circle” and land “painfully, ten feet away on the cold stone floor” (*TGOF* 229). Thus the children are punished for abusing magic, but the nature of their punishment is both magical and violent, and not in proportion to the crime. Either this scene supports both violence and magic as means to resolving conflict, or its excess represents a critique of corporeal punishment.

“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). With the words “blood blossoming” Rowling associates the botanical world with the dark forces. She even beautifies the violence by describing it with a floral metaphor. This is reminiscent of Homer’s

beautification of violence with nature metaphors, and of similar metaphors in medieval war poetry like *The Song of Roland*. This is not to question the appropriateness of importing into children's literature poetic devices that exist in war poems, this is only to question the need to normalise and aestheticise an avoidable violence by comparing it to a normal event like that of blossoming flowers.

Another reason why violence in *HP* is easily overlooked is that the author tempts readers to overlook the whole moral dimension of its violent scenes by coating them with a bland form of comedy. For example, in a scene that seems funny Hagrid uses magic to punish Vernon by attaching a pig's tail to his bottom, to which Vernon responds by howling in pain (*TPS 48*). Hagrid's method of teaching Vernon a lesson is a questionable one, and certainly Uncle Vernon's disposition towards Harry does not improve. However, after Dumbledore threatens Vernon Harry's life in the Dursley household does improve. Although this is a realistic means of improving Harry's life, we might expect a better method from Dumbledore.

When Snape and Lockhart agree to demonstrate proper conduct in a magical duel Snape becomes so incensed by Lockhart's bragging that Snape attacks with unjustified violence.

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)

Afterwards Lockhart totters to his feet and pretends that he was not humiliated. Perhaps this is supposed to be funny, or perhaps vain Lockhart’s misfortune is something young readers can gloat over. In light of Lockhart’s contemptible character, the whole scene seems calculated to prevent us from noticing that Snape’s violence was unwarranted, and that Harry’s and Ron’s crass indifference to the violence is not reprehensible.

After Sirius Black persuades Harry that he is the boy’s protector and that Professor Snape is his enemy, Sirius leads the unconscious Snape away by causing him to float near the ceiling. “[Snape] 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 is so unnecessary, unwarranted, and gratuitous, especially in children’s literature, that it must surely be the product of the author’s cynical and ironic intentions.

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 is doubly hypocritical in a book that relies so heavily on violent scenes. However, when such hypocrisy is considered in light of the critical undertone this hypocrisy begins to sound like irony.

Ironically, Hagrid, a giant who is prone to violence and apparently incapable of much magic, speaks of the potential danger of magical solutions. Hagrid explains why the existence of witches and wizards must be kept secret from common people: “Blimey, Harry, [otherwise] everyone’d be wanting’ magic solutions to their problems. Nah, we’re best left alone” (*TPS* 51). This marks an important warning to the “Muggle” children who read Rowling’s works, and can be used as a response to religious reactionaries who fear that Rowling is promoting magic. Besides, although Harry and company frequently effect temporary solutions by using magic, in its present state they have not effected any permanent solutions to their problems, and Voldemort is more powerful than ever, and this implies a critique of their methods. Even if she continues her series, Rowling likely will not give Harry or her readers an easy solution to death. Perhaps a difficult solution will come, or already exists. For Tolkien the greatest function of fairytale is to remove the fear of death. Socrates expected it from philosophy. Most people seek the solution in religion. In her CBC interview with Shelagh

Rogers Rowling 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.”

### iii. Harry’s Fall into Violence

Many professors, authority figures, and adults in *HP* commit violence against one another and against children, so it is not surprising that Harry learns little else from them. Originally he is not disposed to commit violence, but he does develop a predisposition for it. In the first book, where Harry first loses his temper at Malfoy, he uses the harmless Tickling Charm (*TCOS* 145). In the same book he prevents Ron from committing violence. By the second book he 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. Harry then tries to solve his problem by practising magic against Aunt Marge. She inflates “like a monstrous balloon” and floats to the ceiling (27). Perhaps the magical aspect of this act of anger makes it all very amusing, and the sheer nonsense of it does seem reminiscent of nonsense verse and the work of Lewis Carroll. Moreover, in “A Defense



of Nonsense” G.K. Chesterton wrote, “wonder at the shapes of things, and at their exuberant independence of our intellectual standards and trivial definitions, is the basis of spirituality and is the basis of nonsense” (43). Still, this does not give authors the liberty to excuse scenes of senseless and vengeful violence simply because the violence is executed in a nonsensical manner.

By the end of the fourth book Harry seems to have regressed to infantile behaviour. When he 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). In the same book Malfoy’s insults cause him so much rage that Harry loses the power to speak, and his anger bursts through and he uses a painful magical curse against Malfoy (*TGOF* 262). When Malfoy mocks Harry’s friend 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. None of this stupid and antagonistic behaviour solves any of Harry’s problems, it only ensures that he will continue suffer, perhaps more than ever.

An amusing example of Rowling’s attempt at a critical representation of violent solutions occurs when 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 narrator tells us that Harry became so angry that he forgot that he was “short and skinny and thirteen.” This leads me to believe that the narrator thinks Harry was stupid to forget that he is too small to beat Black in physical combat. This is a ridiculous criticism because it suggests that Harry’s only mistake was in resorting to violence against the wrong opponent, not in being violent when more constructive possibilities still exist.

If this catalogue of violence committed by Harry does not suffice to show that Alan Nesbit is wrong to praise *HP* on the grounds that “[i]n the epic battle between good and evil, good always wins” (*Perspectives* 5), then surely the violence recorded in the last chapter of *TGOF* does show that he is wrong. In that last chapter Malfoy mocks, or rather teases, Harry and Hermione, and for this relatively harmless gesture Harry, Hermione, and Ron strike not only Malfoy unconscious, but also his two friends, and afterwards they “kick, roll, and push” them (633). Such behaviour does more than blur the difference between good and evil, it challenges us to complicate simplified notions of the moral order in *HP*. The violence committed by Harry authorises us to say that insofar as Harry represents goodness, and Malfoy evil, Harry is Malfoy, and Malfoy is Harry. This connecting and entwining of character identities establishes a structure that mimics the environmental vision of the interconnected structure of Nature. Such envisioning of the world

is crucial to the establishment of justice. Adam Curle, in his work on violence, writes that peacemaking requires what “the Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh calls *inter-being*. This implies a full awareness and appreciation of our interdependence with each other, of the links which connect us with our fellow creatures” (141).

Finally, the combined facts that Dudley loves blowing up imaginary aliens and that Dudley is satirised suggests that the author is critical of a culture that glorifies and trivialises violence (*TPS* 35). If we ignore the injustice of mocking Dudley and not Harry we may never suspect that the author is silently critical of Harry, or is naïve, or is deliberately catering to the worst desires of her readers.

#### iv. Harry’s Verbal Deficiency

In the opening pages of her series Rowling seems to forewarn us about Harry’s verbal deficiency, for she makes him a very poor speaker and a *poor organiser of words*. In his first recorded attempt to converse he is ten years old but 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). Considering his step-parents and the nature of a Hogwarts education, Harry has little hope of improving, and consequently, as we shall see, Harry remains plagued by inner turmoil.

Much of Harry's inner turmoil is caused by his fear of Lord Voldemort. When Harry admits that his Boggart (manifestation of his worst fear) was Voldemort before it turned into a Dementor, Lupin says, "That suggests that what you fear most of all is – fear. Very wise, Harry" (*TPOA* 117). This sounds insightful, even wise, but it is really nonsense. To fear fear is like thirsting for thirst: even if it was possible it would only make life worse, even intolerable.

Just as Harry cannot create peace within himself, so he fails to create peace in the world. Harry's first attempt to avoid conflict occurs when the three ruffians Malfoy, Goyle, and Crabbe attempt to make him their friend and bluntly tell him that *Ron* is the *wrong* friend. Harry's response consists of only one sentence: "I think I can tell who the *wrong* sort [of people] are for myself, thanks" (*TPS* 81; italics mine). Instead of humouring people who want to be his friends Harry offends them by flatly stating that he can choose his own friends, and consequently he makes Malfoy his bitter enemy.

In chapter nine of *TPS* Malfoy finds Neville's glassy eye-like "Remembrall" in the grass. Harry, being quick to judge, assumes Malfoy will do something wrong with it. "Give that here", Harry commands Malfoy, first quietly and then again loudly. Malfoy is so amused by Harry's commanding tone that he cannot resist playing a cruel prank, one that provokes Harry to utter threat and risk his life. All this might have been avoided by a little subtlety on Harry's part. He might also

have avoided it by bluntly informing Neville that little glass objects are not worth fighting for, even if those objects contain images of loved ones.

But Harry himself will not learn the above truth about images until “The Mirror of Erised.” There, in what now seems like a rare moment of wisdom, Dumbledore says concerning the looking-glass and its images,

It shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts ... However, this mirror 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).

So Harry must live, but how? Ironically, by not dreaming about real people. He must forget his link to the real world and devote all his thoughts to the magical world of Hogwarts. What is worse, Harry seems to interpret Dumbledore’s advice about not staring at the reflecting glass as advice not to  *reflect*  on anything. Certainly when Harry does think it is always uncritically, and only about how to fulfil his desires. 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 organised 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 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). Of course Malfoy continues, and Harry repeats his first mistake and says, “Shut up, Malfoy.” This is indeed realistic, not fantastic. A fantastic response might be one in which Harry shows how harmless mockery is by mocking himself, or by telling Hagrid to do so instead.

In a later scene Malfoy mocks Harry, and Harry’s first response is a casual one. However, afterwards Malfoy mockingly remarks that Harry should only fly his broom if equipped with a parachute. Now Harry does not respond casually, instead he responds in kind, and in doing so he lets Malfoy bring him down to Malfoy’s level, which spells victory for Malfoy. Northrop Frye addressed this danger when he explained why he refused to answer student questions in a straightforward manner, that is, he refused to come down to the level of his students. Although Frye’s motive was not to avoid conflict, in either case refusing to respond in the way you are expected to respond requires more thought and leads to something more thoughtful. In Frye’s words it is important for the instructor not to “consolidate the mental level on which the question was made” (*The Great Code* xv). In other words, a wise Harry might respond to Malfoy’s remark about the parachute by asking Malfoy for a

parachute; but doing so would require real humility, not to mention wisdom.

Later, in the third book, Snape says that Harry's father James Potter strutted, and Harry denies it because his idealised vision of his father does not permit him strutting. However, Snape speaks from memory, Harry only expresses his desire. When Snape continues to dismantle Harry's idealised vision of his father 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 idealises 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 inability to accept that desires probably do not agree with reality

In the fourth book Harry's intellect still shows no signs of progress. When Malfoy 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, and the change does not deserve to be called a sign of intellectual development. 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).

Two lines in particular show that Harry's language is, in terms of intelligence, no different than brutal physical violence. In the first line Harry wants to use language to cause violence: "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).

A close look at books like *How to Help Children with Common Problems* will show that many of these common problems, including daydreaming, are shared by Harry. In *Artful Mediation* the authors list 5 causes of violent and awful conflicts, and we can now see that 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)



To end on a comical note, before we blame Harry for lacking wit and reason, both qualities we expect from human beings, let us note that Rowling has hinted that Harry is not human, that he is less than human. Harry has something of the snake's nature in him. He speaks Parseltongue and the Sorting-Hat itself questions Harry's desire to be in any house but the house of Slytherin. Secondly, Harry has a spider-like nature. He is comfortable being with spiders and he lived with them in the cupboard beneath the stairs in the Dursley house. And Rowling seems to support the spider-Harry identification 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). Similarly, *Harry Potter* is also exceptionally 'hairy'. As a baby his head had "a tuft of jet-black hair"; and ten years later we learn that Harry "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 Poverty

Rowling has publicly commented that Harry is smart (*Newsweek* 23). My argument will ignore this comment on the basis that there is plenty of textual evidence that she, her narrator, or we did or should think that Harry is stupid, a fraud, or at least an antihero. Furthermore, at

least one eminent commentator has anticipated this opinion by writing: “Harry learns nothing from his mistakes about his teacher [Snape]” (Tucker 226). He might have added much more, including the fact that Harry also mistakes much of what Sirius Black says and does.

In *TGOF* Rowling gives copious evidence of Harry’s mental poverty, and in having done this she challenges the reader not to think that Harry is heroic. An example of such evidence occurs on page 25. There, soon after he experienced pain in his scar, Harry considers writing about it to Dumbledore, then thinks that “[e]ven in his head the words sounded stupid” (25). Stupid is hardly the right adjective when only pride prevents him from admitting his fears, although, ironically, stupid boys do tend to choose the wrong words. Afterwards Harry’s fear of Voldemort overcomes his pride, and he writes to Sirius about his fear. Ironically, in that letter he calls his cousin stupid for destroying the one gadget that helped his cousin “take his mind off things” (27). The criticism is hypocritical because taking his mind off things is precisely what Harry decides to do when he accepts the invitation to the Quidditch World Cup in the next chapter.

Harry and his friends very liberally use the word ‘stupid’ to describe the actions of other people (*TPS* 25, *TGOF* 35, 54, 313, 394), but the narrator returns the favour by describing Harry’s thoughts in a way that makes him seem very stupid. During the Quidditch World Cup Harry becomes so mesmerised by the sexy Veela that “half formed

thoughts started chasing through Harry's dazed mind" and he feels inspired to do something really stupid (94), and accidentally does so by losing his wand.

Harry is hardly an exemplary or thoughtful student, and his fellow students know he is not a top student (276). During Professor Trelawney's class Harry's thoughts drift because the "the perfumed fire always made him feel sleepy and dull-witted, and Professor Trelawney ... never held him exactly spellbound" (177). Nevertheless, Harry is spellbound by the professor's words. He cannot stop "thinking about what she had just said to him." Just how Harry thinks about those words is not clear, although, judging from the italicised verbatim repetition of her words, Harry's notion of thinking about a Professor's words means senselessly repeating them.

Other subjects simply prove too difficult for Harry's brain. 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). Back in *TGOF* we learn that Harry "was finding it hard to think about the future at all" (275). When someone asks him if he has thought about the fact that many champions die his answer implies he has not thought about it. Hermione struggles to teach him the Summoning

Charm, and the narrator tells us that Harry had “developed something of a block about them” (278).

Soon afterwards Moody, to all appearances, tries to help Harry win the Triwizard Cup by telling him that “a simple spell ... will enable you to *get what you need*” (301). Harry immediately forgets all about his suspicion that someone is trying to get him killed in the Triwizard contest. Then, despite knowing that brooms are not allowed in the competition, and decides that Moody has hinted for Harry to use the Summoning Charm to get his broom into the egg-stealing contest. We might ask why Harry didn’t use the same charm to summon the egg into his hands, because doing so would have been much less dangerous.

In Chapter Fifteen 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. Ironically, in this same letter he insists that “*my head feels completely normal.*” The irony of this becomes still sweeter when, three pages later, a voice in Harry’s head tells him that his desire to jump is stupid.

According to the narrator, Harry often speaks without thinking, but especially in the presence of a pretty girl (223) and when his mind is on her (338). When the same pretty girl, Cho Chang, wishes him well, he doesn’t answer and he feels “extremely stupid” (277). When Harry should really disrobe before embarking on a challenging swim for the

second task, he either forgets to remove his robe or, from shame of his body, swims in his robe.

In “The Egg and the Eye” Harry’s brain receives a rare compliment; but the compliment’s value is dubious. The compliment comes from Moody, a paranoid man, and he pays his compliment because Harry suggested that a few of the strange happenings in the world suggest something fishy. Moody probably compliments Harry’s suspicion because it assures him he’s not alone in his paranoia.

Perhaps the most humiliating comment about his intelligence occurs after Harry learns that Ron is jealous of him. Initially Harry responds with self-pitying anger, and when Hermione tries to help Harry think he responds, “will you shut up for a bit, please? I’m trying to concentrate.” However, “all that happened, when Hermione fell silent, was that Harry’s brain filled with a sort of blank buzzing” (296).

In “The Pensieve” Harry admits he’s never had too many thoughts, but in the next chapter his head reels from an excess of thoughts, thoughts he cannot organise because he has no Pensieve, or pen and book, with which to “siphon them off” for study. Two pages later Hermione expresses her frustration at Harry for forgetting, again, that Muggle “things don’t work around Hogwarts” (529), a remark that might apply to Harry, and seems to echo Hermione’s interest in the blue collar workers at Hogwarts.

One piece of evidence that seems to contradict the argument that Harry is intellectually undeveloped is the fact that he solves the Sphinx's riddle in the Third Task. This fact, indeed, seems to turn all the previous evidence upside-down. However, Rowling has inscribed an explanation in her text. She writes that prior to finding the Sphinx the "world turned upside-down" for Harry (542), and this is true insofar as Harry suddenly demonstrates independence and intelligence by solving the Sphinx's riddle unaided. The act of turning the world upside-down really only serves to provide this excuse for Harry's intelligence; all the other strange things that happen afterwards are not stranger than the things that happen throughout *Harry Potter*. The one exception to this observation is that after the world turns upside-down the colour green (symbolic of witchcraft) is associated with Voldemort and red (symbolic of Judaism) with Harry. Previously the relationship was the reverse.

If all this evidence of Harry's stupidity accurately portrays the state of contemporary youth, why must Rowling be realistic on this matter? Perhaps she hoped her readers would recognise the face of stupidity; or again, perhaps she cynically predicted her readers would not notice that Harry is not worthy of their admiration.

## vi. Taking Responsibility for Harry's Brain

Although Harry's deficiency as a speaker might reflect his age, the more probable reason for Rowling's humiliating portrait of Harry is that there seems to be no mass market for a secular hero who utters intelligent verses, imperatives, parables, aphorisms, and so forth. Poets, philosophers, sages, people who speak about the eternal human condition – rather than about fleeting particulars – are not important members of our modern society, so why would a modern child want to identify with one, and a modern writer of children's literature want to write about one? We might counter that Rowling's work really does not depart, in this respect, from the norm in children's literature. This is half true; the other half of the truth is that few other main characters in the children's literature are as heroic as Harry, or in the same way. His many feats and challenges make him more like a superhero, or like the Greek heroes Hercules and Odysseus, than like an child-hero in modern children's literature.

There are also fictional causes for Harry's mental deficiency. For example, Rowling seems to have intentionally placed Harry in an environment that is anything but conducive to a child's intellectual development. There is no evidence, at any time, that students at Hogwarts are encouraged to ask questions, master language, discuss social issues, or even study logic. In the words of Lewis' professor, "Why don't they teach logic at these schools?" (*The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe* 47). But Hermione does have some mastery of logic (see

“Through the Trapdoor”), and her moral development far exceeds Harry’s. She is, quite frankly, the unspoken hero. But let us keep shut this door and proceed a little more logically.

The house Harry grows up in is no better than Hogwarts. Rowling’s narrator tells us that the first rule in the Dursley household was “*Don’t ask questions*” (20). Two pages later, two pages after Harry’s first recorded and first failed verbal exchange with the Dursleys, Harry again speaks to his step-parents, “but they weren’t listening” (22). Unable to ask questions, unable to converse with his primary caretakers, and largely confined to the space beneath the stairs, is it any wonder that Harry became a kind of pre-verbal Frankenstein? Surely, in light of his failures to communicate with human beings, Harry’s ability to communicate with snakes is ironic.

Harry’s choice of friends also contributes to the retardation of his mental development. Ron is not just immature. Discounting Neville he might be the only student less intelligent than Harry. His stupidity is evident in almost every quotation wherein he plays a role. In contrast to his brothers, Ron is emotional to a fault, and sarcastic rather than ironic.

Still, it would be easy to forgive Harry’s mental and verbal retardation if, during the course of the series, he showed signs of improvement. Unfortunately, as we saw earlier in this chapter, Harry does not show signs of improvement, and his teachers are generally a bad influence.



Moreover, if we discount the value of Dumbledore's few and questionable instructions to Harry, Harry has no mentor, but plenty of de-mentors. Even snakes, despite being symbols of wisdom in ancient mythologies (and even Christ said "be as shrewd as snakes" (Matt. 10:16)), are useless to Harry. Rowling removes any association snakes have with wisdom. The fact that Harry does communicate with snakes might be ironic, but speaking is not necessarily a sign of intelligence, as the narrator reminds us by stating that Harry shouts "*stupidly* at the snake, 'Leave him!'" (TCOS 145; italics mine)

Harry's growing tendency to resort to violent solutions may also be a product of his education, and of a child's tendency to imitate adult superiors. Violence among the male teachers at Hogwarts is common. 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.

Speaking of education and Rowling's critical voice, with her Joycean wit she probably derived the name 'Hogwarts' from 'hogwash,' especially given the English tendency to pronounce 'wash' as 'warsh.' This deprecatory derivation is supported by the school chant, which is difficult to read without imagining Rowling's ironic grin:

*'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”? Assuming that “things worth knowing” does not refer to lessons related to magic, judging from this discussion, the curriculum at Hogwarts was not intended to teach them anything worth knowing.

Who needs wit, reason or verbal skills for anything but money? But even our money-driven world still attempts to create peace and a moral order by using words, and of course it usually fails. We invest billions into the research and development of increasingly complicated military technologies while our ability to create complex verbal patterns remains relatively unresearched and undeveloped. Harry, like children of most First World countries, is a product of an education system that creates this discrepancy, and consequently he reaps continual conflict. Harry's

upbringing and education are doomed to create children quite void of intelligence.

It is one thing to say that characters fail to learn anything worth knowing, but that is no reason for us, as readers, to fail to learn the lessons Harry did not learn. Harry's primary lesson concerns death, that universal human condition which is *central* to the series. How does Rowling want us to understand death? Significantly, the single teaching memorised by Harry is the one *Dumbledore* utters about death: "After all, to the well-organised mind, death is but the next great adventure" (*TPS* 215, 218). *But this sound like an invitation to suicide; or like the advice of a filling clerk.* Or is it something else? Well-organised – in what way? *Dumbledore* speaks of spotting "patterns and links" (*TGOF* 519), a subject we shall address in the Epilogue.

#### vii. Intelligent Solutions?

One method of effecting instant solutions to problems, a method which is neither magical or violent, is the method taught for suppressing Boggarts (significantly, their name contains a comical reference to Humphrey Boggart, the once popular, very serious, male film star). Boggarts always appear in the form of what the witness fears most. According to Lupin, only comedy can defeat a Boggart, and to do so one must mentally "force it to assume a shape that [they] find amusing"

(*TPOA* 101). In the pages that follow several students face the object of their worst fears and instantly conquer them by imagining their object of fear doing something funny or being something funny. In relation to violence and magic this method has psychological depth; however, if it was a viable long-term solution to fear it should have serious disciples in the field of psychoanalysis. The fact that it does not probably indicates that it is not easy to practice, or that it is as unrealistic and 'magical' as the 'real' magic practised in *Harry Potter*.

In a similar exercise of the imagination 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). The anger remains, consequently it is Harry's head, not Snape's, that is abused. But what, then, should Harry (and his fans) be doing with his head? Can we expect him to study Socratic philosophy; or should he, like Christ, learn to use those 'magical' powers of language that give men hope, that quell anger, and inspire thought and life?

Socrates exercised a great deal of irony, and Rowling also practices it. The extreme and abrasive language of her characters and her narrator contrasts sharply with the language of predecessors like E.E. Milne and Edith Nesbit, and this extremism is one example of Rowling's habit of writing one thing and meaning another. Although her language might be considered a product of realism, or a product of the continuing moral

decay in the arts, this analysis shows that it is likely the product of an author who is aware of this problem and who has exaggerated it in the hope that it will be noticed.

The most obvious examples of satire are Rowling's portraits of Vernon Dursley. For example, while he has egg on his face he says, "Do I look stupid?" (*TCOS* 7). The fact that Rowling reserved her most blatant satire for the Dursleys is important because the Dursleys, as the enemies of imagination, represent Rowling's arch-enemies. Rowling cannot use magic or violence to transform her enemies into non-enemies, she transforms them with satire. This transformative method is very similar to the one taught by Professor Lupin for the suppression of Boggarts; for satire, like irony and parody, is a species of comedy.

To further qualify this paper's note of moral condemnation, consider that Rowling pretends no instant or easy solution to the great transformer of life, death. Death incarnate, Voldemort, continues to live while Harry's parents remain dead, and Harry continues to live as best as he can, knowing that "what would come would come ... and he would have to meet it when it did" (*TGOF* 636). My own view is that Harry is less ready than ever to deal with reality, and that Rowling's readers face the same danger.

## EPILOGUE

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 to 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).

Neither irony, parody, or the propaganda-like simplicity of a political speech were 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. Christ 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 which 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.

### **Rowling's Conclusion: A Thesis Defence**

The four Potter books were first published in four consecutive summers, and following this pattern we expected the fifth last summer, and now a second Harry-less summer has arrived and the Associated Press reports that Rowling will not publish the fifth Potter book this summer. Still, Rowling did claim that her series will consist of seven books, and consequently anyone who embarks on writing a thesis on these books faces the daunting criticism that nothing conclusive can be written about them until the author publishes the remaining three books, as promised. This chapter will show that, regardless of those promises, there exists some evidence that the existing four books form a closed circle, and that, as seems increasingly likely, the promised final three books will not be written and delivered.

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.

We know that Rowling intentionally parodied themes in C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series, and we know the *Narnia* series comprises seven books. To hint at the fact that her fourth book is indeed the last, Rowling alludes to the last paragraph of Lewis' seventh book in the last paragraph of her fourth book. 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 "The Beginning." Again, in Lewis' last paragraph the narrator says of the characters: "at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story".

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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 Kloves: 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.

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