Abstract

Since the publication of the *Harry Potter* novels (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000-British editions)[1], J. K. Rowling has become one of the most well known authors in the world. Various criticisms have been made of the novels, especially concerning their suitability for children. Questions have been raised, from certain religious quarters, as to whether these works promote evil or lead children astray. Other critics however think that these novels represent an important contribution to children's literature and provide the child reader with valuable role models. Many authors, including John Granger, Phil Miller, Philip Nel, Barry Smith, all argued that Rowling's newly created magical world, and especially its key setting, Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft, provide the child reader with valuable models for the exercise of the imagination and the development of a healthy fantasy life.[2] Various authors, including Deirdre Donahue, Julia Eccleshare, John Granger, Connie Neal and Lisa Hopkins, all praise the works of J.K. Rowling as encouraging a love of reading and of literature among children.[3]

---

[1] The American publication dates for the *Harry Potter books* are 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 for the first four books in the series.

[2] John Granger, *The Hidden Key to Harry Potter: Understanding the Meaning, Genius, and Popularity of Joanne Rowling's Harry Potter Novels*, 2002; Phil Miller, 'Church puts faith in Harry Potter,' *Sunday Times* (2 Sept. 2001, 10 Mar. 2003), http://www.cesnur.org/2001/potter/sept_01.htm; Connie Neal, *What is a Christian to do with Harry Potter?* 2001; Philip Nel, *J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Novels*, 2001; Barry Smith, 'Is Harry Potter An Evil Influence?' Pastors of Severna Park. (2001, 5 Mar. 2003), http://www.spepchurch.org/resources/worldview/harrypotter_print.html

[3] Deirdre Donahue, 'Plot twist keeps young reader interested,' *USA Today* (07 Oct. 2000), http://www.usatoday.com/life/enter/books/potter/hp05.htm; Julia Eccleshare, *Contemporary Classics of Children's Literature: A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*, 2002; Granger, 2002; Neal, 2001; Lisa Hopkins, 'Harry Potter and the Acquisition of Knowledge', in *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays*, 2003, p. 29.

Much has been written about the underlying facts, myths, science and magic associated with these novels. This secondary literature includes teaching guides written by Linda W. Beech and Elizabeth D. Schafer[4] and biographies written by Ben Buchanan, Marc Shapiro and Sean Smith[5] of J. K. Rowling and other literature concerning the Harry Potter phenomenon. There is however no established tradition of critical scholarship for these works because they are so new. For that reason this thesis relies on the application of critical methods and strategies relevant to children's literature more generally in order to understand and make judgments with regard to the Harry Potter phenomenon and corpus.

The arguments against the Harry Potter phenomenon are essentially from opposite ends of the cultural spectrum. The works are attacked – from a Christian fundamentalist perspective – by those who dislike this new magical world. Authors including Richard Abanes, John Houghton, Joseph Chambers, James Bjornstad, and others argue that the *Harry Potter* novels have various adverse influences on children, including the promotion of the occult, and the failure to teach a proper distinction between good and evil.[6]

---

[4] Linda Ward Beech, *Scholastic Literature Guide: Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J. K. Rowling*, 2000; *Scholastic Literature Guide: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets by J. K.Rowling*, 2000; *Scholastic Literature Guide: Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban by J. K. Rowling*, 2000; *Scholastic Literature Guide: Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire by J. K. Rowling*, 2000; Elizabeth D. Schafer, *Beacham's Sourcebooks for Teaching Young Adult Fiction: Exploring Harry Potter*, 2000.

[5] Ben Buchanan, *My Year with Harry Potter: How I Discovered My Own Magical World*, 2001; Marc Shapiro, *J. K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter*, 2000; Sean Smith, *J. K. Rowling: A Biography*, 2001.

[6] Richard Abanes, *Harry Potter and the Bible: The Menace behind the Magick*, 2001; John Houghton, *A Closer Look at Harry Potter: Bending and shaping the minds of our children*, 2001; Joseph Chambers, 'Harry Potter and the Antichrist,' Paw Creek Ministries (23 Sept. 2002),

The novels and the Harry Potter phenomenon are also criticized from other perspectives from authors like Julia Eccleshare, Jane Elliott, and Christine Schoefer as promoting sexist and classist behavior and failing to provide the child reader with adequately varied role models.[7] There is also a criticism from Barry Smith that the novels gratuitously promote the idea of a distinction between good and evil, and thus create unnecessary 'us and them' divisions in the imaginative world of the child.[8]

From both sides there is criticism that the child reader may be misled in these texts by the ambiguity between magic and real world.

Through close analysis of the texts (the four novels published at the time of writing), this thesis shows that neither the corpus of *Harry Potter* texts nor the Harry Potter phenomenon encourage occult or evil practices among children. There is a good versus evil theme to each novel, and these stories strike similar kinds of balance between good and evil to those made in various novels. The *Harry Potter* novels, presume that there is an eternal struggle between good and evil, and they teach the reader how to make the right kinds of judgment on such issues. To answer criticism from the other side, the *Harry Potter* novels, through key female character Hermione Granger, do provide adequate and powerful role model for girls. The

---

http://www.pawcreek.org/Harry%20Potter.htm; James Bjornstad, 'Potter Mania: What is it all about? A Look at the Orphaned Boy With Wizard Powers', In Personal Freedom Outreach (2000. 18 Oct. 2002), http://www.pfo.org/h-potter.htm

[7] Eccleshare, 2002, p. 84; Jane Elliott, 'Stepping on the Harry Potter Buzz' (2001. 7 Mar. 2003), http://www.bitchmagazine.com/archives/3_01potter/potter.html; Christine Schoefer, 'Harry Potter's girl trouble', *Salon* (13 Jan. 2000. 10 Mar. 2003), http://www.salon.com/books/feature/2000/01/13/potter/index.html

[8] B. Smith, http://www.spepchurch.org/resources/worldview/harrypotter_print.html

world presented by Hogwarts does relate both realistically and magically to those of high school aged children throughout the world. Throughout the series of novels there is a clear distinction between the magic and real world.

To understand their impact on children, it is necessary to examine these novels in depth, and especially to follow the development of the major characters in the series, namely Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley. By following their development and the associated moral themes, social and political issues and ideas in the series, we can comprehend the influences of these characters as role models on children. Studying the characters and the stories and contexts in which we find them also addresses questions about the value of the moral education provided by the *Harry Potter* novels, and role of this piece of children's literature as compared with other canonic. In addition, by surveying the development of these three major characters in the stories we can understand the positive impacts Rowling's works have on the development of the child reader's ethics and moral judgments.

***

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One introduces the author J. K. Rowling and the Harry Potter phenomenon. According to Julia Eccleshare and John Granger, the image of Harry Potter has been planted widely in people's lives, and especially in that of children.[9] There has been great enthusiasm for various manifestations of the phenomenon. The first Harry Potter film *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, based on Rowling's first book, has been released in one hundred and thirty different countries. Educational authorities, like Linda W. Beech, Julia

[9] Eccleshare, 2002, pp. 1-13; Granger, 2002, p. 1.

Eccleshare, Philip Nel, Marc Shapiro and others have lauded the books for encouraging children to read.[10] It is enthusiasm for these stories that has drawn child readers in and kept them reading, from book to book, and into other literary works. Support for the Harry Potter phenomenon has, along these lines, largely been from educational quarters. The works are praised as educative, as encouraging literacy by authors like Linda W. Beech, Julia Eccleshare, John Granger, Philip Nel and others.[11] The first chapter of the thesis will introduce the arguments, mentioned above, both for and against the *Harry Potter* novels and their contents.

Chapter Two deals with character theories in literary criticism written by Mathew Arnold, E. M. Forster, Edwin Muir and many others and their related disciplines.[12] Contemporary theories of character development from creative writing like those written by Kate Grenville, William F. Irmscher[13] and others and those from drama by Lajos Egri[14] are discussed, along with the historical development of ideas about character (in and out of fiction), since Aristotle, and including the medieval theory of the four humours and more recent psychological and psycho-analytic theories of character written by Aristotle, Hippocrates/Galen, Sigmund Freud, C. G Jung, Ralph Metzner and others and those translated by J. L.

---

[10] Beech, 2000; Eccleshare, 2002; Nel, 2001; Shapiro, 2000

[11] Beech, 2000; Eccleshare, 2002; Granger, 2002; Nel, 2001

[12] Mathew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy' (3 April 2003), http://www.uoguelph.ca/englit/victorian/HIML/anarchy.html; E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 1974, pp. 73-81; Edwin Muir, *The Structure of The Novel*, 1957, pp. 24, 26, 29, 32.

[13] Kate Grenville, *The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers*, 1990, p. 45; William F. Irmscher, *The Holt Guide to English: A Comprehensive Handbook of Rhetoric, Language, and Literature*, 1981, pp. 282-283.

[14] Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives*, 1960, pp. 60-61, 106, 115.

Creed and A. E. Wardman.[15] These theories help us to have a better understanding of the character development of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, as dealt with in the following three chapters. Opinions as to the quality of role models offered by Rowling's characters by Amanda Cockrell, Eliza T. Dresang, and others are addressed with reference to these ideas.[16] The impact of the Harry Potter characters on the child reader's character is thus able to be assessed. The role and function of Rowling's protagonist characters is considered in this light.

Chapter Three discusses the major protagonist in the series of novels, Harry Potter. It looks at his development, especially through his interaction with the key antagonists, namely the Dursleys, Draco Malfoy, Professor Snape and Lord Voldemort. The set of issues related to the development of Harry Potter's character includes:

- issues concerned with the struggle between good and evil discussed by John Houghton, John Killinger, Connie Neal, Amanda Cockrell, Jann Lacoss and Terry Doughty and others[17]

---

[15] Aristotle, *On Poetics* in *Great Books of the Western World*, 1992, pp. 682-689; J. L. Creed and A. E. Wardman, trans, *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 1963, pp. 414-424; Hippocrates/Galen, *Hippocratic Writings/ Galen On the Natural Faculties* in *Great Books of the Western World*, 1992, pp. 1-38, 406-414; Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 1965, pp. 51-56; C. G. Jung, *The Development of Personality*, 1954; Ralph Metzner, *Know Your Type: Maps of Identity*, 1979, pp. 37-45.

[16] Amanda Cockrell, 'Harry Potter and the Secret Password: Finding Our Way in the Magical Genre', in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, 2002, pp. 15-26; Eliza T. Dresang, 'Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender', in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, 2002, pp. 211-242.

[17] John Killinger, *God, the Devil & Harry Potter: A Christian Minister's Defense of the Beloved Novels*, 2002; Cockrell, 2002, pp. 15-26; Terry Doughty, 'Locating Harry Potter in the "Boys' Book" Market', in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, 2002, pp. 243-260; Jann Lacoss, 'Of Magicals and Muggles: Reversals and Revulsions at Hogwarts', in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, 2002,

- power relationships between him and Voldemort discussed by Hollie Anderson, Philip Nel and Mary Pharr[18]
- related social issues, including racism, prejudice, materialism convassed by Julia Eccleshare, and John Granger[19]
- the complexity of situations and ethical crises faced by Harry discussed by Terry Doughty, John Granger, John Killinger and others[20]
- attitudes to big 'life issues': the meaning of life and death, fear, personal responsibility, moral responsibility for one's actions convassed by M. Katherine Grimes and Jann Lacoss, Deborah J. Taub and Heather L. Servaty, John Granger and others[21]
- the relationship between fantasy and reality, for instance between magical and Muggle worlds, and the connection between destiny and choice are revealed through Harry's activities and interactions as discussed by John Kornfeld and Laurie Prothro, Jann Lacoss and Maria Nikolajeva[22]

As the principal role model for the reader, the development of Harry Potter as a

---

pp. 67-88.

[18] Hollie Anderson, 'Reading Harry Potter with Navago Eyes', in *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, 2003, pp. 97-108; Nel, 2001; Mary Pharr, 'In Medias Res: Harry Potter as Hero-in-Progress', in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, 2002, pp. 53-66.

[19] Eccleshare, 2002, p. 9; Granger, 2002, p. 33; Andrew Blake, *The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter*, 2002, p. 79.

[20] Doughty, 2002, p. 243-60; Granger, 2002; Killinger, 2002

[21] M. Katherine Grimes, 'Harry Potter: Fairy Tale Prince, Real Boy, and Archetypal Hero', in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, 2002, pp. 89-124; Lacoss, 2002, pp. 67-88; Granger, 2002; Deborah J. Taub and Heather L. Servaty, 'Controversial Content in Children's Literature: Is Harry Potter Harmful to Children?' in *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, 2003, pp. 53-74.

[22] John Kornfeld and Laurie Prothro, 'Comedy, Conflict, and Community: Home and Family in Harry Potter', in *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, 2003, pp. 187-202; Lacoss, 2002, pp. 67-88; Maria Nikolajeva, '*Harry Potter* – A Return to the Romantic Hero', in *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, 2003, pp. 125-40.

character points to some of the most important issues and debates raised by Rowling's series of novels.

Chapter Four discusses the major female protagonist, one of Harry Potter's best friends, Hermione Granger. Through discussion of the development of Hermione's character, political and social issues related to gender roles, romance, racism, and education are discussed. Some critics declare, with reference to Hermione's role in the novels (and that of minor female characters), that the stories are sexist from author like Julia Eccleshare and others.[23] Others, like Joelle Cowan, Michelle Fry and others[24] proclaim that Hermione is actually the true heroine of the series and the power behind Harry Potter. This chapter considers issues related to gender roles by comparing Hermione's role and discussing her relationship with other female characters in the series (particularly Professor McGonagall and Lily Potter). Hermione serves as the only female protagonist who strongly strengthens the triangle alliance (Hermione, Harry, and Ron) with her powerful knowledge of both Muggle and magic worlds, her moral voice, and her feminism which both of the male protagonists do not possess. Her eagerness in education enables her to learn to do the right thing. Through the process of education and her political sense in setting up a campaign for house-elves, her morality is clearly shown. It is also her enthusiasm in education and her political awareness that overturn the stereotypical representation of females, as she is a strong and determined protagonist. She is able to draw the Muggle and magical worlds together with her increasing knowledge and strengthening morality. Hermione's morality helps to make the series attractive from

---

[23] Eccleshare, 2002, p. 84

[24] Joelle Cowan, 'Deconstructing Harry: A Contrarian for Kids and Parents,' *The Contrarian* 5.3 (15 Feb. 2001. Pacific Research Institute. 7 Mar. 2003), http://www.pacificresearch.org/pub/con/2001/01-02-15.html; Michelle Fry, 'Heroes and Heroines: Myth and Gender Roles in the Harry Potter Books,' Master Thesis, 2001.

a parental point of view. However some critics who disparage the *Harry Potter* books for their 'promotion of the occult' find Hermione's witchcraft offensive.

Chapter Five discusses Harry Potter's other best friend, Ron Weasley. Ron comes from a large and completely magical family, so his experience of the Muggle world is limited. Ron's character development is thus in a sense parallel to Harry's. As Harry learns about the magical world, Ron learns about the ways of Muggles. Ron calls a telephone a 'fellytone.' It is through Ron's point of view the reader gets to see her own world and technology made unfamiliar. Discussion of Ron's character allows us to focus on issues related to family and society, issues such as trust, loyalty, bravery, friendship and sacrifice. Through Ron's view, the reader gets a new angle on the relationship between fantasy and reality as presented in the novels. Bringing Ron into the picture allows us to consider trianglular relationships among the three major protagonist characters.

Chapter Six focuses on parallels with protagonist characters in comparable canonic works of children's fantasy literature: Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings* series by J. R. R. Tolkiens and Peter Pevensies in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis. The character development of these protagonists is compared with that of Harry Potter, in order to assess whether or not there has been any historical change since the 1950s in fictional fantasy role models for children, and in order to see whether and/or how the moral investments of the genre have shifted.

The concluding chapter draws together various issues from the discussions of each character in order to consider the set of key issues with which we commenced, and especially concerning:

- issues associated with the struggle between good and evil
- the relationship between fantasy and reality
- social issues relating to power and gender
- personal development issues, related to judgment, responsibility and friendship

With reference to the conclusions drawn here, the moral lessons of the series, and the ethical, educational and other impacts on the child audience are assessed.