

Effects of Media Hype and Mass Popularity on Essence of Literature:

As Seen from J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*

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Inspiring Excellence

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Abstract

Contemporary literature has walked metaphorical miles since earlier times—and the marked improvement in it can be seen in J.K. Rowling's renowned fantasy/magic realist series, *Harry Potter*. Not only does Rowling make great use of themes, ideas and plots that have always been known to work their magic; she uses a new tool—the magic of media—to help her books create a solid fan base. Her seven-part series is one of the examples that portray the extent to which media has engulfed literature; in that literature has become lost, confused and misguided by the false and pretentious media hype and fandom. This dissertation ventures into the realm of *Harry Potter* to examine how modern literature rises to popularity, why this leads to the downfall of the core of the same literature; and how it can be demystified by authors and readers alike.

Introduction

The *Harry Potter* series has gained mass popularity due to the ease with which it combines elements of the real and the magical. While many would argue that the series is strictly a part of magic realism, which in turn is a subset of the wider net of the genre of fantasy/fiction, many others would suggest that this series is, in fact, a fusion of various genres in one. In order to find out more about what the series is like, it is first important to define what magic realism is. In *Merriam-Webster.com*, there is more than one definition of magic realism that is available and in use. According to this definition, magic realism, or magical realism, is “a literary genre or style” that is linked especially with Latin America (*merriam-webster.com*).¹ This definition also goes on to add that it is a form of realistic fiction with an addition of mythical, fantastical or magical elements to it.

However, unlike many other books, the books in this series are not strictly bound to this genre and its typical nature. Although it often seems to appeal to an unsuspecting reader as a magical realist text, it is not always simply so. It combines the worlds of Muggles and Wizards so perfectly that those readers actually begin to doubt their own understanding of the foundation of the genre that this series belongs to. Rowling’s writing shows how ideas that are almost complete polar opposites of one another, can still be brought together and tied up under the umbrella of the same logic or topic; thus showing that it is possible to create a quasi-realistic world by combining elements of the real with those of the imagined.

The series is often said to be a Bildungsroman, since it shows the progress of the life of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood [i.e. of *Harry Potter*]. For the purpose of my paper, I shall be using more or less the entire seven-book series; often comparing them with one another, as well as with their on-screen translations—to show how exposure by means of popular media can adversely affect the contents of literature, often in the blink of an eye. In

¹ In the online version of the Merriam Webster dictionary, additional meanings of magical realism, along with the roots of the phrase, can be found.

my introduction, instead of highlighting the entire series, I have chosen to highlight the first, fourth, and seventh books. I did so because I felt that these were important to understand how Rowling's style of writing changed throughout the creation of the series. While the first three books show her literary development as an author, with her maturity peaking in book four; it all seems to crumble from book five, with the end being disastrous to those who comprehend literary meaning in what they read.

In different books, like some of those giving the biography of author J. K. Rowling; it has been shown how Rowling has consciously and perhaps even subconsciously, integrated bits and pieces of her own life into these stories. In fact, it has been done in this series to the extent that to the erudite reader, the *Harry Potter* series may well seem to be an informal reminiscence of Rowling's own life; complete with all of its ups and downs. However, Rowling has interwoven her life experiences in a way that every person that reads this story is transported into either their own childhood, or is found to desire a childhood that resembles Harry's [especially his life in Hogwarts].

In order to be able to fully relate and comprehend the extent of the ingenuity of J.K. Rowling in creating the magical world of wizardry, one has to trace back to her roots, and see what her inspirations and her muses were. In William Compson's book *The Library of Author Biographies: J. K. Rowling*,² there are many insightful details about Rowling's past, including those with relation to her creation of the *Harry Potter* heptalogy. It is not surprising that Rowling has used many a mundane detail from her own life in the series; but it is rather amusing to see how well she incorporates these ideas with her imagination to create the loveable young boy wizard and his world of wonders.

When she was in high school, Rowling used to be a short, shy and chubby girl, and had thick glasses perched on her nose amidst a bed of freckles. In other words, she was an

² Read the book *The Library of Author Biographies: J. K. Rowling* by William Compson, where Compson provides vivid descriptions of Rowling's life prior to *Harry Potter*, and shows how she was inspired to create the series.

introverted bookworm. Her own glasses are said to have inspired Harry's trademark round glasses (Compson 16). One of Rowling's strict teachers at Wyedean Comprehensive, a Mrs. Morgan, was another person from Rowling's life to have given her inspiration—and who later became the muse for the character of Severus Snape, the conniving and often cruel teacher; who is seen to be a living nightmare for Harry.

However, one of the most interesting facts about J.K. Rowling has been given by Colleen A. Sexton in her book *Biography: J.K. Rowling*. This says that the Rowlings' home in Tutshill was located next to a cemetery, which Rowling claims to have "liked" (Sexton 17).³ She added that she [Rowling] still adores graveyards because they are an amazing source for names. This is perhaps where she had gone to in order to look for interesting names of people and characters for the *Harry Potter* series. The village of Tutshill was located near the ancient Forest of Dean—which may have been a location where Rowling found her true friends.

This may be a reason why the Forest of Dean becomes an important location in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*—it becomes a place where old friends are reunited, and where feuds are resolved. She even used the names of her favourite playmates as the basis for the name of the "Boy Who Lived"—as Sexton writes in the biography, Rowling had liked the names of the brother-sister duo she played with during their childhood days in Winterbourne; Ian and Vikki Potter (Sexton 13).

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, we can see how young Harry steps from a world of anonymity to a world of instant fame, glory and a world with the promise of immense wealth and power. Contrary to popular expectations, young Harry is shown as a humble, little boy—painfully aware of his position in life, and trying to survive in this dog-eat-dog world. Although his life with the Dursleys was not really something as special as to

³ Colleen A. Sexton gives a well-rounded account of Rowling's childhood and weaves in details that become greatly relevant to avid fans of *Harry Potter*. This can be found in her book *Biography: J.K. Rowling*.

be mentioned, it later becomes clear to the passionate reader how life with the Dursleys was a crucial step in the final development of his personality.

It almost seems as though Rowling is drawing a comparison of Harry with the typical Dickensian hero when the reader is first introduced to his likeness. He is thin and lanky, with a head full of messy, black hair; and wearing clothes that looked like they had been taken off of a baby hippopotamus. Had he lived a life of plenty with his parents still alive, he may have been just as selfish a brat as Dudley, or just as obnoxious as Draco—if not much, much worse.

His [Harry's] features almost seem parallel to those of Oliver Twist from Dickens' classic *Oliver Twist* or of little Pip from *Great Expectations*.⁴ This book also shows how the 8-year-old Harry learns to adapt to the world of magic, having lived in a strictly Muggle household throughout a greater part of his childhood. It is almost like introducing a homeschooled child to conventional schooling; with the main difference being that Harry is bewildered instead of being intimidated, and has many people looking after him in the wizarding world; a whole lot more than there were to care for him in the world of Muggles.

The fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, is the turning point of the series, and of Harry's life. It shows the return of the antagonist [Lord Voldemort] and how it changes the entire plot of the story. It is centered around two wizarding events that are shown to be of utmost importance, largely because readers are introduced to wizards from other regions of the world that have attended institutions other than Hogwarts—with each perhaps following different teaching/learning styles, and being located in a different country or region than the United Kingdom.

The first significant wizarding event in this story is the Quidditch World Cup, which can be seen as a parallel to the football world cup of the Muggle world. While this sets the

⁴ Charles Dickens was well-known for writing social realist texts, some of which fall under the genre called Bildungsroman. *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* are two of his most popular Bildungsroman texts.

pace for more horrific events to occur later on in the course of the story, the climactic event in this story is the Triwizard Tournament, which seems to have taken the ancient gladiator fights as inspiration, where the best wizard wins; and if needed, this has to be done by removing all other wizards from the fray. Harry's personality, along with Rowling's style of writing—seem to have developed markedly since book one; which is also seen from Rowling's inclusion of girls as possible romantic interests. In this book, Rowling shows twists and turns that take readers back to the idea of a fairytale, in a brand-new package that is Rowling's personal writing style. It seems that along with Harry and the readers, Rowling has also grown-up and is in her prime as an author.

The final book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, is a crucial piece in the foundation of my paper. This shall act as a contrast to the other two books, particularly because it greatly deviates from the basic plot that had been set in motion in the first three books of the series. While the other two books showed Rowling's prowess as a writer, this book seems to disappoint in terms of content and in terms of Rowling's use of her signature style. Neither Harry nor Voldemort, nor any of the other title characters seem to achieve the things that they had aspired for in the beginning of this promising series. Nevertheless, it is most important because although it has been divided into two parts for the sake of maintaining literary integrity; the on-screen version fails to deliver—which shows that different aspects of media may bring popularity for literature, but degrades it in terms of literary quality.

The raging disparity between the latter *Harry Potter* movies and the books that they were based upon goes to prove the point I made earlier, about media adversely affecting literature. In the movie for *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, large chunks of important details were transformed or completely obliterated. For example, the pale blue dress that Hermione is seen to wear to the Yule Ball turned into a dull rose pink in the movie, while her

bushy brown hair went up into a bun instead of coming down sleek and straight, as Rowling expertly describes in the book. Also, the part where Hermione's front teeth keep growing because of a curse shot by Malfoy, is deleted from the movie,⁵ which makes it redundant to show that her teeth have been shrunk, because it has been rendered irrelevant or moot.

One might easily argue that due to the vastness in size of each of these books, it might have been a better idea to turn these into a television film divided into parts, or a television series divided into episodes; rather than making them into films that questioned the integrity of purpose of the author of literature that had originally sought to enrapture billions.

Although the last movie of the series was divided into two parts to maintain the integrity of the story, the story itself seems to have deviated from Rowling's original magical and mystical style of writing. Towards the end, she seemed to have switched to a style that would be able to make readers happy, which makes it somewhat difficult for readers to remain deeply engrossed in the books.

However, it could also be disputed that commercialization of the *Harry Potter* series gave Rowling a sense of over-confidence, which is probably why she let her imagination be ever so slightly swayed by media hype, globalization and other media advances surrounding the phenomenon of *Harry Potter*. Perhaps she wanted more fame as well as to be thoroughly appreciated by fans and readers alike—and this is probably the main reason behind the loss of the imaginative value of the series, and the subsequent loss of its purity of essence and character. It seems to move away far from what it had originally strived to become; showing that perhaps Rowling struggled with the confusion created by various aspects of media. Then again, maybe the readers and Rowling both had set themselves up for failure—maybe it was not Harry's fate to be all that he had striven to be, and more.

⁵ The scene can be read in extravagant detail in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* chapter 18 “The Weighing of the Wands”.

In my research paper, I will try to show how this deviation from originality was caused by the commercialization of the literary basis with which Rowling had begun to write the stories. In doing so, I will look at how the *Harry Potter* experience has been transformed due to the greatly inflated popularity of the series due to the blockbuster success of the films; and how it has led to the commercialization of the literature that it was built upon, changing its essence and how it is read at least partially, if not completely.

Chapter 1

Transforming Literature into Films: Creative Interpretations or Mistranslations?

In contemporary times, literature has been known to be greatly affected in its essence by the fan base it creates. Most of the series of today's day and age start off as something that is quite divine and sublime, catering to the exact needs of the fans in question, but once they become popular through the help of mass media, the true foundation that the author had built seems to crumble, the enigmatic aura dissipating before the reader's very eyes.

This effect of fandom on the popularity of modern literature can be studied by observing the hype over some of the well-known series; for example *Harry Potter*; and how the fandom and media hype made the latter books lose their essence in terms of what they had originally strived to be. The literature suffers even further when it is changed while being turned into a screenplay—all of it done just to offer a fresh new view, so to say. There are quite a few ideas that are going to be discussed here in details—ideas which had initially seemed to give the series a real edge; but due to the increasing popularity, influenced the author to change them so as to further spawn popularity. However, it seemed that in doing so, the author herself ensured that she was writing now to satisfy consumer demand, possibly by downgrading the imagination which needs to be at the heart of any literary or artistic creation.

The amount of time and dedication that Rowling put into the thinking process that led to her development of one of the greatest and most widely read stories of all time is evident from the way she has used near and distant memories and an unmatched intellect to choose names that aptly suit the personalities of the characters and do justice to the locations she has used throughout the span of the entire series. One of the first names that sticks in the reader's mind is probably the name of the headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Albus Dumbledore. The description that must be noted when speaking of the

reader's first significant encounter with Dumbledore is in the first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*:

He was tall, thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground and high-heeled buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright, sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man's name was Albus Dumbledore (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* 8).⁶

According to the book *Friends and Foes of Harry Potter: Names Decoded*, the name Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore is not simply a ridiculously long name for any fictitious or real person, but is a mark of the mastery of the author's ingenuity and intellect. Each of the separate components of the headmaster's name make up the persona that fans have come to know and love as Professor Dumbledore. The name Albus Dumbledore means white bumblebee in Latin, and Rowling is said to have thought of the man with the white hair and beard to be "humming to himself and always on the move", just as busy and efficient as a bumblebee is (qtd. in Agarwal 27).⁷ Percival was the name of one of the Knights of the Roundtable; while Wulfric is a combination of wolf and ric, where ric means rule and power. The entire name shows the two-sided personality that Dumbledore exhibits in the series; on one hand he is a kind and generous teacher, while on the other hand he is a strong and fierce warrior (27).

While it may be an undisputed fact that Rowling has been capable in giving a just name to the character of the headmaster of Hogwarts, one might always argue that he was not given the deserved end in the series. Dumbledore's death seems rather tragic, untimely and

⁶ This block quotation has been taken from the book *Friends and Foes of Harry Potter: Names Decoded* by Nikita and Chitra Agarwal. This book can be read to find a list of all of the interesting names in the series, and a history of how they came about.

⁷ The description of Dumbledore's name is from the book mentioned above, see footnote 6.

strangely unusual in the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. From the very first time that Dumbledore is brought into the story, it has been shown that while he has a kind nature, he is not one wizard to be messed with---one that even the fearful Lord Voldemort is afraid to face. As a result, most of the climactic events in the stories only take place after Dumbledore is at least temporarily removed from the scene---be it Professor Quirrell's failed attempt to steal the philosopher's stone after Dumbledore has gone away to London, or the arrest of gamekeeper Rubeus Hagrid after he had allegedly opened the Chamber of Secrets fifty years prior to the events of book two.

Dumbledore's eyes appear to be crystal clear and calm blue, yet they somehow seem to radiate energy that cannot be found elsewhere. It therefore seems quite absurd that the life of a wizard as powerful as Dumbledore comes to such an abrupt end at the hands of an amateur wizard as inexperienced as Draco Malfoy. That Dumbledore is given such an unexpected ending seems to reflect Rowling's own state of mind at the of formulation of this particular death---it seems as though her reluctance in wanting to part ways with a good friend results in a sudden and possibly quite meaningless ending. While some may feel that Rowling ended Dumbledore's life in the series in order to give Harry room to grow up and face his own reality; but many readers will say that in a chaotic world, Dumbledore's death by a mere child is vividly opposing to the personality of Dumbledore that is seen in the series---of a powerful and enigmatic leader who is ready to face any challenges head-on. If anything, it should be seen as an insult to the wisdom and intellect of Albus Dumbledore---although Rowling might have saved some scrutiny had she tried to stick to the literary essence of the plot rather than trying to fit in to the norms of the genre.

This was not the only way that the media hype around Rowling's magic world destroyed the world of wizardry for uninitiated readers. Some of the latter like *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* were massive in length, particularly because they were intricately

detailed. As a result, when turning these into screenplays, they posed a big question: should the makers focus on maintaining the integrity of the entire book and include all of its details, or should they just skip parts that do not lend to the climax of the story? Often commercial filmmakers choose to take the latter action, not realizing that even though the part may not have had an active role in building up the climax of that particular book, it may go on to be an inseparable part of the climax of the complete series.

For example, the scene where Harry, Ron and Hermione cross the campgrounds to collect water, encountering a number of different wizards-in-training on the way, is left out of the movie.⁸ For those of the viewers that have not read the book before watching the movie, it will not allow them to realize the amount of insanity that builds up at these wizarding events, almost as though extraordinary decorations are a mirror-image of those done during the football world cup of the Muggle world.

Unfortunately, *Harry Potter* is not the only series that has suffered due to increasing popularity affecting its original identity. A recent example would be the movies of the Rick Riordan series titled *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*.⁹ Although the books were originally a five-part series, because of consumerism induced popularity, the writer has created spin-offs using the same characters and incorporating some new elements into the existing ideas.

However, the movies do not in any way maintain the plot. The plots seem to be loosely based on Riordan's novels, but important details seem to have been turned around for commercial profit. Percy is supposed to be an eleven-year-old boy in the book, but in the movies he is about fifteen or so. Both Percy and Annabeth are supposed to be blonde according to the books, but in the movies both are brunettes. Grover is supposed to be white but is shown as black in the movies. The worst part probably is that the movie that claims to

⁸ The particular scene that is described here is from *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* by J.K. Rowling, pg. 75. The book can be read and compared to the movie to see the deletions/deviations made from the story.

⁹ The Rick Riordan series titled *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* is a set of five books. Set in contemporary America, it describes the adventures of a young demi-god born of Poseidon. The movies can be watched to note their deviation from the original storyline.

be *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* is, in reality, an odd mumbo-jumbo amalgamation of the last four books in the series—with huge chunks of the story missing altogether.

These are not the only problems that are given rise to by the popularity of literature. Classics like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* of renowned English playwright William Shakespeare have been cut up, altered, and basically turned upside-down—all in the name of breaking it down and making it comprehensible and accessible to all classes of people. *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, has had modern-day adaptations made in Hollywood and in Bollywood, and much to the dismay of critics, the films seem to bear no resemblance to Shakespeare in any way whatsoever. The 1996 version starring Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio is set in a place called Verona Beach, where both the Montagues and the Capulets are business families; and Juliet is being married off to Paris as part of an ingenious investment plan. The movie seems to be nothing but an abomination in the guise of modernity; as I feel that Shakespeare only appears romantic and alluring when it upholds its integrity and is kept as close to the original as possible.

Likewise, the modern-day Bollywood adaptation of *Hamlet* as *Haider* seems to lose Shakespeare lovers in the translation. Shahid Kapoor is *Haider* [the Indianized *Hamlet*], whose mother is played by Tabu. The most marked of differences is that Haider is not the Prince of Denmark, although the director sets it in picturesque Kashmir; perhaps to make the heinous alteration of Shakespeare tolerable to critics and lovers of Shakespeare. Even though Hindi films must contain a song or two to make them palatable to the audience, the songs set in such movies fail to help the plot along in any way. If anything, they hinder the original progress of the plot as has been intended by the screenplay writers after they have created a tormented version of Shakespeare's play that is as far from the original as England is from India.

All this transformation and upgrading of well-known literature has been done in the apparent name of modernizing a classic. In case of contemporary literature, it is constantly being mistranslated in the name of keeping things fresh and new. Still, there will always be some people who support the adaptations and transformations, attributing it to the creativity of the filmmaker or the screenplay/teleplay writer in discussion—saying that these adaptations are what actually make the original books or stories memorable to today's generation. Many current readers and viewers might agree that the makers have liberty to interpret the story in any way they deem fit, so long as they specify that their film is a work of fiction that is based upon a particular story—which allows them to take however much or little inspiration from the original plot as they would like to.

Here again lies a paradox—should one keep having these circular arguments when it comes to translating stories into screenplays or teleplays? Perhaps a play should be kept as it is, and only be performed on stage. Likewise, maybe a book should only be converted to film when the makers can maintain its essence throughout. The scene of the play reminding Claudius of his brother's murder in *Hamlet*, or of the soliloquies; may only have the intended impact when they are being staged or read rather than when they have been improvised for translating onto the silver screen. Perhaps it is expected that as soon as an author has produced a piece of work, they have made it open to criticism and to interpretations of various sorts—which is why it is unfair to try and make works of literature conform to idealistic notions given that any sort of exposure, especially popularity, is bound to affect their integrity; for better or for worse.

Chapter 2

Generic Fusion Raising *Harry Potter* to Unexpected Heights of Fame

Reading *Harry Potter* as a piece of children's literature is very different from reading it as one of the inseparable components of contemporary literature that serves to entertain children and adults alike. However, as easy as reading the series may prove to be, it might be equally difficult to classify it into any one particular genre at all times. When a reader tries to analyze the various parts of the series, taking into account dissimilar sets of incidents at different times, there might be varying answers that they find to the question "which genre does it belong to?"; each one satisfying a different view on the subject. According to June Cummins, many people that teach and/or are reading *Harry Potter* are said to already "be aware" that Rowling mixes up many different kinds of genres or styles in her famous contemporary series *Harry Potter* (Cummins 177).¹⁰

One of the many styles that Rowling's series fits into is the Bildungsroman, as it follows the life of the protagonist from childhood into adulthood; showing how he matures gradually during this transition. Robert T. Tally Jr. writes about how this series fits into the genre of Bildungsroman, although it does not completely fit into the historical context of the genre (Tally Jr. 38).¹¹ Tally says that the Bildungsroman was a "dominant form in European literature", and in order to see whether *Harry Potter* fits the bill, it is necessary to define what the Bildungsroman is.

The Bildungsroman, according to Tally Jr., is often translated as a novel 'of "education" or "formation",' but the Bildungsroman is in reality much more than that. It is a novel that shows the protagonist maturing through his/her formative years, growing in the

¹⁰ This is from an essay by June Cummins titled "Hermione in the Bathroom: The Gothic, Menarche, and Female Development in the Harry Potter series (sic)." It is a part of the book "The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders", edited by Karen Coats, Anna Jackson and Roderick McGillis.

¹¹ Robert T. Tally Jr. writes an essay titled "The Way of the Wizarding World: *Harry Potter* and the Amazing Bildungsroman" for the book *J.K. Rowling Harry Potter* [sic], where he compares how *Harry Potter* fits into the genre popularly known as a Bildungsroman.

body, mind and in intellect, in order to gain knowledge on how to find one's way in the wider world (Tally Jr. 36). Although it was initially meant to comprise of nineteenth century novels like Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Tally Jr. claims that in spite of the *Harry Potter* series not fitting into the historical background for the Bildungsroman; it is often thought to be a Bildungsroman as the narrative shows the growth of a "young person" from childhood to adulthood, and is also the story of a person moving from "ignorance and naivety [sic] to knowledge and mastery" (38), which befits the main theme of the heptalogy of *Harry Potter*.

The Bildungsroman is merely one of the numerous genres and forms that *Harry Potter* is thought to belong to. Along with being referred to as a Bildungsroman, it is also often said to be a gothic novel, a magic-realist novel and a fantasy novel.

The gothic novel is quite different as a genre from the gradually growing Bildungsroman. The gothic novel is thought to have come into being with the writing of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which is said to be the first gothic novel of all time.¹² According to Professor John Mullan, gothic fiction began as a refined "joke" when Walpole used gothic in the subtitle of his story, which was published in 1764. It paved the path for gothic stories as they are known today, which consist of quite a number of elements. Gothic is said to "involve the supernatural (or the promise of the supernatural) [sic], it often involves the discovery of mysterious elements of antiquity, and it usually takes its protagonists into strange and frightening old buildings" (*britishlibrary.uk*).

Taking this particular component of the gothic fiction into account, it can be seen that *Harry Potter* also incorporates gothic elements into it throughout the series. From the very beginning of the series, there are gloomy landscapes and buildings, and even the fact that there is a character deemed so frightening that almost nobody dares speak his name assures readers of the presence of the gothic. One of the classic parts that can be read as gothic fiction

¹² Professor John Mullan writes about what gothic fiction is, and the origins of the gothic novel. It is part of an article titled "The Origins of the Gothic" in a series titled *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians*. This can be found on the website <<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-the-gothic>>

is in the book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, when Harry, his friends and Malfoy are sent to the Forbidden Forest on detention.¹³ Since gothic fiction requires the protagonist to be sent into odd, scary buildings, and here Harry is sent into an equally scary place, it could be thought to be reminiscent of gothic fiction. Although the Forbidden Forest does not count as a building, it is clearly one of the scariest and gloomiest backdrops in the series. It holds a sense of foreboding unlike any other, and is mysterious to the characters and the readers alike.

Drawing attention to an earlier incident, there is the first time that Harry [and his readers] comes face to face with the monumental building that is Hogwarts. Here Rowling's description of the school that bears witness to Harry's development into a matured individual could be seen to unwittingly match that of Professor Mullan's description of the gloomy, eerie building into which the protagonist of the fated gothic fiction must be sent. Rowling writes: "The narrow path had opened suddenly on to the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers" (Rowling 83).¹⁴ It is perhaps because readers are inclined to see Hogwarts as an escape from the darkest parts of their lives, much like it is in the books Harry's escape from his gloomy past with the Dursleys—but often the entry to Hogwarts might be the last thing that is expected to be a gothic element.

However, to an outsider and a neutral observer, Hogwarts may well appear to be Professor Mullan's scary and strange-looking gothic building that in this case, the young protagonist is sent into—which, being also full of mysteries unknown to all, could very well lead to the protagonist's horrifying end. The fact that Rowling blends this so well with the contemporary plot may be a good reason for the marketing success of the *Harry Potter* series.

¹³ The incident under discussion takes place in Chapter Fifteen: "The Forbidden Forest" from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The four children: i.e. Harry, Ron, Hermione and Malfoy are sent into detention for being out of bed after hours.

¹⁴ Harry and the readers see their first glimpse of the Hogwarts grounds [mainly the castle] in Chapter Six: "The Journey from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters" from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

Many critics would argue that since Rowling blends different styles and literary genres into Harry Potter, it could be referred to as a magic-realist novel—particularly because the main plot of the series is often claimed to be magic realism. In order to see if this particular text has elements of magic realism in it, the concept of magic realism must be examined.

Magic realism, or magical realism, is defined by Stephanie Leigh-Scott in her book titled *Locating the Sublime: Three Cases of Cultural Magical Realism* (Scott 2).¹⁵ According to her, there are two basic distinctions in magical realism: ontological magical realism, and epistemological magical realism. Epistemological magical realism is said to have been quoted by Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria in 1974, which is defined as: “a kind of magical realism in which the magical element is derived from aspects of knowledge rather than from a cultural belief” (qtd. in Scott 2).¹⁶

In *Harry Potter*, the magic in any character is not an inheritable quality, but rather depends upon his/her innate ability to enter into the realm of magic. Perhaps it is due to this reason that Lily Potter has magic, but her rather bony-faced, nosey older sister Petunia Dursley does not. In its most basic sense, magic realism could be thought to be a combination of the two words it is made up of: magic and realism. Therefore, any magic realist text should seek to combine the magical and imaginative world with the harshness of the real world. Then, *Harry Potter* fits into this fundamental ideology as perfectly as is possible.

In the series, the world of the unimaginative Muggles coexists alongside that of the mystical world of Magic. Harry’s world turns upside-down when his ordinary, mundane Muggle life starts taking an interesting turn; and eventually Harry comes to know how he has magic, and needs to acquire its knowledge in order to master it.

¹⁵ Stephanie Leigh Scott discusses three different novels as case studies of cultural magical realism in her book titled *Locating the Sublime: Three Cases of Cultural Magical Realism*, where this definition of epistemological magical realism can be found.

¹⁶ Echevarria’s quote on epistemological magical realism, one of two main kinds of magical realism, can be found on page 2 of the aforementioned book.

Even something as simple as a brick wall is seen as a magical entity [the wall outside the Leaky Cauldron that leads into Diagon Alley], which opens readers up to a world of possibilities, the key being that magic could be present in the most unmagical of situations, objects and even people, which is the basic thought behind magical realism. Since Rowling tries to bring forward such instances where readers have no option other than to find the magic within them, *Harry Potter* can be seen as a magic realist text in its most elemental sense.

Finally, there is the fantasy novel—the one that *Harry Potter* is thought to have a strong foundation on. The fantasy novel is perhaps the umbrella which all of the other genres that have been discussed fall under. Fantasy is one of the core constituents of the genre known as fiction, which includes everything that is not based on real-life stories or events, i.e. fictitious events. According to Virginia Brackett and Victoria Gaydosik, “Fantasy fiction” merges features that demand any expectations of reality on the reader’s part to be suspended (Brackett, Gaydosik n.p.),¹⁷ which by Coleridge was fittingly termed as the “willing suspension of disbelief” (Coleridge n.p.).¹⁸

Brackett and Gaydosik claim that a couple of fantastical elements should be present in the story or novel to deem it a proper work of fiction. These elements might include time travelling, deviating from “normal physical rules” such as gravity, living beings changing physical shape or form, creating life other than by “physical conception and birth”, creatures being too large, too small or gigantic to be normal, animals’ ability to talk and perform with human intellect are only a few of the factors that make any work of fiction fall into the category of fantasy fiction.

¹⁷ The *Encyclopedia of the British Novel* by Virginia Brackett and Victoria Gaydosik defines various terms related to or falling under “novel”, where the definition for “fantasy” can be found.

¹⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined this term in 1817 in his book *Biographia Literaria*. Reading this book [particularly chapter 14] will help find out about his thoughts on poetry.

In *Harry Potter*, one of the key elements of the fantasy fiction is most definitely present. After his encounter with little Harry, Voldemort is almost completely destroyed, stripped of his powers—and to many it seems like there is peace in the fact that Voldemort seems to have truly died. However, in due time, Voldemort is seen to be revived from three crucial elements; and the ritualistic manner in which he is raised from his ‘nothingness’ could be effectively termed as a rebirthing ceremony of a crude sort, in which Tom Riddle is truly reborn from his broken and weakened physical state. The giant squid, the dragons, as well as Rita Skeeter’s animagus [she turns into a beetle] all prove how creatures can be too big, too tiny or too enormous to fit into the expected ideals of normalcy.

Being an amalgamation of such a diverse variety of genres may render it difficult to classify the *Harry Potter* series, but it also is one of the crucial reasons behind its worldwide mass appeal. The critical acclaim can be attributed to the clean precision of Rowling’s narrative style, and the smooth transitioning she does when combining several of the most well-known literary genres of all time. It is also one of the many reasons why this particular series is termed a marketing miracle by many critics and readers alike. However, this can also be seen as a prime reason behind the fact that consumerism adversely affected the essence of the *Harry Potter* series. From all of the genres present, the central premise of the series is the age-old battle between good and evil, which can be seen through the lens of the literary theory of Structuralism bringing into focus the binary opposition of good vs. evil.

Chapter 3

Binary Opposition and Good vs. Evil: Ingredients for Mass Popularity

Contemporary literature that has gained mass popularity in recent times has done so largely because of the fact that it has used strategies and styles that have worked since time immemorial. Be it *Harry Potter*, *Eragon*, or *The Lord of the Rings*—all of the respective authors have found a niche that has been working for such a long time, simply carving out space for their unique literary works.

The central plot of *Harry Potter*, the idea of a clash between good vs. evil, has been attracting audiences since the morality plays of the Victorian era. Morality plays, back then, were the way in which the Roman Catholic Church would try to teach the people about sins, and what could happen to Man should he choose to give in to the enticement of these sins. This was basically how they would scare people into buying pardons to be supposedly forgiven of all sins. Goethe's *Faust* and Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* used these morality plays as their muse;¹⁹ to highlight Man's surrender to temptation from the seven deadly sins, and his complete despair in failure to adhere to God's rules; which together work to bring about his downfall.

Marlowe's play was published in the year 1592, and is said to be a Renaissance tragedy—and is considered so because the hero experiences highs and lows in his life before he succumbs to a life of sin and despair, which leads him to be taken to hell. It is a spin on the classic morality play, which is yet another literary genre under the umbrella term of plays. A morality play is defined by G.A. Lester in his book titled *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays: Mankind, Everyman, and Mundus et Infans*. This play is said to have been popular in England between the 15th and 17th centuries,²⁰ and the definition for it is “the dramatization of

¹⁹ Christopher Marlowe's famous play *Doctor Faustus*, as well as Goethe's *Faust*, derive their inspiration from morality plays. Read the books to know more about the plots.

²⁰ In the introduction of G.A. Lester's book *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays: Mankind, Everyman and Mundus et Infans*, he defines what a morality play is.

a spiritual crisis in the life of a representative mankind figure”, in which the struggle of the aforementioned figure is depicted in the argument between personified versions of the forces of good and the forces of evil (Lester n.p.).²¹

This conflict between good and evil could be thought to be similar to Man’s fall from grace and heaven, as can be seen in John Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost*.²² This chapter shall examine Harry Potter, trying to compare with other literature that has used the good vs. evil theme to attract the masses.

In *Paradise Lost*, the struggle between Satan and Adam and Eve is the inherent clash that exists between good and evil, which is thought to have existed from Biblical times (Milton n.p.). In order to explain this concept, it is necessary to explain the theory of Structuralism. This theory was developed by the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. It tries to study human beings by studying the binary oppositions present in human beings as well as in society—for example, good vs. evil, white vs. black, male vs. female, or rich vs. poor.

In order to know what binary opposition is, it is essential to find out the definition for Structuralism, and how the binary opposition as seen in *Harry Potter* can be related to this particular theory. In his book *Cultural Anthropology: Appreciating Cultural Diversity* [14th Edition], Conrad Phillip Kottak defines what Structuralism is.²³ According to this book, there were two concepts that Claude Levi-Strauss developed in his time. While the first was based on his work with marriage and kinships, when talking about Structuralism, the latter idea is thought to be predominant—its goal is to ascertain themes, associations and connections between the various features of culture (Kottak 69).

²¹ See the book mentioned in note 20 for Lester’s explanation of the term along with examples.

²² *Paradise Lost* is one of the most famous epics written in English Literature till date. It is also another work that has made use of the conflict between good and evil to its advantage.

²³ Kottak defines some key anthropological theories in Chapter 3 “Method and Theory in Cultural Anthropology” in his book titled *Cultural Anthropology: Appreciating Cultural Diversity* [14th Edition]. Structuralism is one of the explained theories.

This anthropological theory has its foundation in Levi-Strauss' principle which says that there are some universal features of the human mind, which are based on the common characteristics of the *Homo Sapiens* [sic] brain. It is these similar characteristics of the mind that makes people think in like ways, regardless of what their cultural background or their social status might be. Among these, there is the universal need for human beings to classify (69).²⁴

Levi-Strauss believed that the mind feels the need to “impose order” on everything around it, which is why people classify everything; treating things as either the ‘self’ or the ‘other’. Thus the concept of binary opposition comes into play here, which is a common way that human beings choose to put society into order. This is why we choose to see each other as man/woman, black/white, or the most basic; good/evil—to be able to see society in a slightly less chaotic form than is facilitated by nature. Levi-Strauss worked on myths and folk tales of various cultures, showing how binary opposition can be used to reverse famous stories like “Cinderella”—which can be reversed to turn into “Ash Boy”, where Cinderella is transposed as Ash Boy (Kottak 70).²⁵

Milton's epic had made great use of the basic concept of Structuralism, incorporating it into a quasi-realistic tale of fantasy; and because of this theory, his work appeals to audiences new and old. In the same way, the plot of *Harry Potter* revolves around this lifelong quarrel between the forces of good [as represented by Harry Potter and his followers] and the forces of evil [as represented by Lord Voldemort and his supporters, more commonly known as Death Eaters] which has always been known to attract readers, consumers and/or audiences.

²⁴ As mentioned in note 23, the theory of Structuralism is discussed from Strauss' point of view in Kottak's book.

²⁵ Levi-Straussian Structuralism includes his work with myths and folk tales. These can be read in complete details with examples in Kottak's book on cultural anthropology.

Young Harry is seen to fight against evil forces from the very beginning—at the Dursleys, he is seen to be putting up with the constant taunts of his uncle, as well as bullying from his cousin Dudley. Later, he has to suffer from the intolerant Professor Severus Snape, who could be seen as yet another of Harry’s adversaries. Life at Hogwarts is made more difficult by the fact that Draco Malfoy keeps making trouble for Harry and his friends. In book five, i.e. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*,²⁶ Dolores Umbridge’s entry into Hogwarts proves to be yet another obstacle in Harry’s life, as Umbridge appears to be one of the most power-hungry spawns of evil that has been seen in the entire series.

There are also other characters like Bellatrix Lestrange, who can be thought to represent the different sins as conceived in the Bible—with most of the Pureblood wizards [like the Lestranges] representing Pride. There is also Wrath that can be seen in the young Tom Riddle Jr., which later turns him into the powerful wizard Lord Voldemort; Envy is seen in Ron Weasley [after Harry’s name is announced as one of the participants of the Triwizard Tournament],²⁷ and Lust can be seen in almost all the characters in book four; i.e. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the boys first begin noticing girls as romantic interests, and vice versa (Rowling 238).

The key to the explanations of the basic idea of the morality play, and its use as a muse for works like *Faust*, *Doctor Faustus* and later *Harry Potter*—is merely for the purpose of clarifying how the use of good vs. evil as the foundation upon which to build a story upon proves to be something of a marketing charm. *Harry Potter*’s fandom has gained such massive popularity worldwide that it is now also being taught as courses in colleges and universities, and even in schools. While this is making the literature gain more fame, it also

²⁶ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* is the fifth book in the *Harry Potter* franchise. It is the book from which Rowling can be seen to begin to deviate from the essence of her creation; the book can be read for further insight into the themes.

²⁷ In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry is announced the fourth Triwizard champion in Chapter Sixteen “The Goblet of Fire.” More details on how Harry is selected can be found in this chapter.

opens up the entire series to more scrutiny; and therefore to the chance of being misread or critiqued wrongly by the novice reader.

The craze of *Harry Potter* has begun to gain such great significance in recent years; that critics are going so far as to coin terms that are related to the phenomenon. In her book *Females and Harry Potter: Not All That Empowering*, Ruthann Mayes-Elma writes about the phenomenon that is being termed as “Pottermania” (Mayes-Elma 5).²⁸ In it, she includes testimonials of different people that are beginning to include *Harry Potter* in their curriculum. One of these is that of Professor Vera Camden at Kent State University in Ohio, who says that the *Harry Potter* novels are very “artistically rich”, and it fulfills the dream of every child; and of the child that is hidden within every adult. It is due to the fact that in *Harry* the readers and audiences identify themselves that the series keeps gaining its credit.

The phenomenon of consumerism, another facet of media’s advance in our world, has managed to creep into Rowling’s imaginative creations; in different ways every time. A fresh perspective on this topic is given in the essay “Specters of Thatcherism: Contemporary British Culture in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* [sic] Series” written by Karin E. Westman. According to Westman, Rowling tries to uphold her loathing or distaste towards the materialism of human beings in the Dursleys, but even the supposedly perfect world of magic has its own materialism and consumerism; portrayed in the numerous shops catering to Wizarding needs, and the existence of a Wizarding banking system [Gringotts Bank].²⁹

It is the same consumerism and materialism which Rowling seems to mock and detest in her initial stages of creation that engulfs the latter books in the franchise. This can be attributed to be a prime reason behind the absurd, sudden and rather unnecessary deaths of crucial characters like Albus Dumbledore, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and the most faithful

²⁸ The miracle of consumerism in the *Harry Potter* franchise is one of the many topics discussed thoroughly in Ruthann Mayes-Elma’s book titled *Females and Harry Potter: Not All That Empowering*.

²⁹ This particular essay can be found in the book *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon* edited by Lana A. Whited. It is mainly about how popular elements of British culture can be found in the *Harry Potter* series.

of all of Harry's friends—his pet snowy owl, Hedwig. There is also the sixth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, which could possibly be removed from the heptalogy without much affecting the integrity of the novels.

In this particular book, it is quite strange to see how Severus Snape mistreats Harry time and again, which is revealed in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* [book seven] to be Snape's way of shielding Harry and providing for him the ultimate protection from Voldemort's destruction. Why should a person that is as vindictive and angry as Snape protect the child of one of his worst enemies, James Potter? The fact that Harry survives every moment under his watchful eye should serve as a painful reminder of his failure to woo Lily Evans in the nick of time. Rowling fails to leave a mark with the sixth book, which could have revolved around something more vital to the histories of both Harry and Lord Voldemort.

Therefore it can be seen how fandom and the rise of consumerism seem to affect popular literature, in this case *Harry Potter*, in an adverse manner that is detrimental to the heart of the plot and theme of the novels. Although some might like a glass half-full view of this phenomenon in question, it seems to be a more common nature to see the glass half-empty view—where there is no real value added to literature by its rising popularity due to fandom, but rather it strikes at the core of the literary creations, and metaphorically sucks them dry.

Chapter 4

Media Hype and Other Media Aspects Leading to Loss of Essence in Literature

Literature has almost always been known to spark critical thought in people who have read it, since the availability of the earliest instances of literature known to mankind. Different genres and styles have come about to accommodate the critical thinking required to fit into the society of different eras—Marxist or Capitalist works becoming more common during the Industrial Revolution and the two World Wars [during and immediately after the phenomena]; Feminist works gaining significance during the 1920's in England, and later around the rest of the world, and Structuralist readings coming up on the literary world map around the time that Imperialism/Colonialism became one of the driving forces of the entire world, and in turn, of humanity.

Since any kind of literature is put down with some sort of intent on the writer/creator's part, it is of the utmost importance that it be read in the context of its creation. For example, although postcolonial subjects might choose to relate the sufferings of young Pip in his text *Great Expectations* to their own,³⁰ perhaps it would be best to try to imagine the situations in the novel in the socio-political context that it was actually created in; i.e. an England that was faced with tackling all the evils of consumerism, industrialization and globalization.

Disregarding the intent behind the creation in question would therefore mean that disrespect was being shown to the author's intentions and to his/her memory. It may also, in some cases, make the literature irrelevant, especially if the conditions in some way have managed to alter the personalities of any of the major characters.

³⁰ *Great Expectations* is a social realist text that highlights the many woes of a young boy living in the countryside of England. Reading it will show the real nature of the socio-political condition of England at the time.

A good example of an altered character would be Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith in her Feminist novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (Woolf n.p.).³¹ He is initially shown to be a gentle, young man who is full of romanticism and idealism; and is also a lover of Shakespeare's works. After he is sent out to World War I, he seems to transform overnight. The gentle and calm Septimus Smith seems to have disappeared into the blue, and had been replaced with a man so thoroughly shaken to his roots that there seems to be little hope of reviving him in any way whatsoever.

Smith's demeanour is nervous and restless, as though sounds from the streets of London keep sending him off into trances where he momentarily revisits his war days. Both Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway seem to be hallucinating between their reality and their pasts; but while Mrs. Dalloway manages to maintain her grip on her present and her reality, Septimus' failure to do so is what results in his ultimate suicide—because he seems to have been rendered incapable to see his faith in humanity restored. It seems that Woolf kills off Smith so that his mirror image in the protagonist can go on living the façade of a social life that she has been shown to be almost obsessed with. This seems to be reflected in the prediction made about Voldemort and Harry—“Neither can live while the other survives.” Perhaps Septimus had to die to allow Mrs. Dalloway to keep on living.

This identity crisis can also be seen in Harry—who keeps shuffling from his past to his present, where having witnessed his parents' deaths seems to have left an indelible mark on his personality. It could be taken as a mirror-image of the life of Lord Voldemort—when he was the orphaned grandson of Marvolo Gaunt,³² he was quite insignificant in the orphanage and had a sorry life to call his own. However, unlike Harry, who always chose to see the inherent goodness in people, Voldemort decides to walk down the path of absolute

³¹ Septimus Smith is often seen as the mirror image of the protagonist Mrs. Dalloway in Virginia Woolf's Feminist novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. The character portraits that Woolf creates give a fascinating insight into the human psyche.

³² Marvolo Gaunt is seen in flashbacks in the *Harry Potter* series as the grandfather of Lord Voldemort.

evil, although the concept of absolute evil is one that is in constant flux and therefore a topic of debate.

While many critics and readers may claim that mass media has contributed to the positive reading of literature, and that fandom has added to it positively; it is an undeniable fact that the more popular any literature becomes, the more open it becomes to scrutiny and criticism from litterateurs and even amateur readers. When an author writes a book, story or a novel, s/he is trying to put a piece of her/his thoughts onto paper. It is therefore a given that it will draw some inspiration or ideas from the author's own life. Whereas in certain cases writers may be more lenient and accepting of different ways of analyzing their works, in most cases, the creative essence that is behind the creation of any literary work is lost when there are too many modern interpretations to it.

The biggest problem with fandom and media hype making any kind of literature popular is perhaps the fact that popularity, like any other aspect of the materialistic world of today, does not come without its disadvantages. If, for example, one reads a work like Dickens' famous *Oliver Twist* without taking into context the particular social reality of the time and age; although s/he may be able to relate to many aspects of the novel, it will not be serving its original intention of upholding the reality of the time to the readers or audiences.

Similarly, although *Harry Potter* is a bestseller that uses a plot that has proven successful since time immemorial, there are certain ways in which its popularity has been affecting and will possibly keep on affecting how the literature itself is read. According to Malin Akerstrand,³³ adolescents in young adult literature, also called YA literature, have a tendency towards being rebellious (Akerstrand 109). They rebel against all parts of the system that they are born in—whether it is their parents, their schools, society or even against the restrictions imposed on them.

³³ Malin Akerstrand's essay titled "Righteous rebellion in fantasy and science fiction for the young: The example of Harry Potter [sic]" can be found in the book *Hype: Bestsellers and Literary Culture*, edited by Jon Helgason, Sara Kärrholm and Ann Steiner (pg. 109-126).

She goes on to suggest that in the *Harry Potter* series, much like some other popular bestsellers of YA literature,³⁴ the rebellions go much farther than being the “ordinary adolescent protest” against one of the many parts of the system. In the *Harry Potter* heptalogy, Akerstrand says that the adolescent rebellion acts as a theme that challenges power relationships that exist between adults and adolescents on a very basic level; because these rebellions depict adolescents who uphold virtuous values and are seen to be protesting against corrupt and waylaid adults. In this manner, these adolescent rebellions are not only cheeky, but they are honourable, or in Akerstrand’s words, “righteous” (Akerstrand 109).

If Akerstrand’s argument is thought to coincide with the basic argument for this paper, then one of the possible derivations could be that without Harry rebelling constantly against the wrongs within the society and the system around him, the series may not have gained the mass popularity that it did. The stereotypical adolescent protest added with the right amounts of ideal marketing strategies and the phenomenon of globalization; gave *Harry Potter* the eager nudge that he required. Yes, Pottermania did indeed become an adolescent craze, but with more time, it became a worldwide craze that grasped adolescents, adults, and children alike.

Although this mass media hype led to an increase in sales that proved to be quite profitable for J.K. Rowling, it led to a dilemma that is often caused by globalization; and is almost like a side-effect of globalization on literature. Suman Gupta quotes Roland Barthes’ term “death of an author” to describe what can be understood to have happened in the case of this series.³⁵ Barthes’ declaration served the purpose of telling the world that the author was no more the “originator of texts”, no more someone whose intentions could be clearly understood, or who could “guide interpretations” of his/her works (Gupta 151). This death of

³⁴ Other examples include the Hunger Games trilogy, the Artemis Fowl series, and the His Dark Materials trilogy [sic]. For more details, see no. 4.

³⁵ Suman Gupta’s book titled *Themes in 20th Century Literature and Culture: Globalization of Literature* has a chapter called “The Globalization of Literature”, where he writes what happens to texts when they go through globalization.

an author, as can be seen in twentieth-century literature, is said to give rise to “low-culture” or low literature,³⁶ as it opens up the particular work to scrutiny from whosoever comes across it. While on one hand this will allude to the rising fame and popularity of the series, it would also be taking the creation away from the identity that the author had in mind when creating it.

Gupta claims that a “fictional “death of the author”” occurs in the *Harry Potter* series, which shows a feeling of “dissociations and slippages” that take place between the author and the text and the reader (Gupta 158). What this means, then, is that often it can be seen that authors create a façade, a false image of themselves and their identity, in order to allow for their literary work to gain more popularity than would ordinarily be possible. Rowling tries to portray in an exaggerated manner, through Gilderoy Lockhart’s final confrontation [before he accidentally loses his memory], that the “contemporary idea of the author,” is a sort of “industrial construct” that is merged with “publicity and mass-media frames”; and has barely any relation with the real author or the texts that have been written by the author.

This, again, is another phenomenon that is used to draw in the attention of readers of various kinds; many of whom would ordinarily shy away from the genre of fantasy. Therefore, it can be said that had there been no dissociation between Rowling and her texts and the persona of her created by media; there may not have been as much popularity when concerning the *Harry Potter* series. Rowling’s desire to gain fame and wealth is what in turn makes her literature lose sight of what is far more important to readers—the core or the heart of her creations crumbles under mass-media hype, even though popularity might suggest otherwise.

Barthes’ idea attests to the fact that there is no author, that the author’s only purpose is to create the text, and therefore leave it open to as many interpretations as possible—which

³⁶ Suman Gupta’s idea of “low culture” or “low literature” can be found in pg. 157 of the chapter named in footnote 35.

shall be done by all those who read the texts. While this may be thought as a revolutionary way of looking at literary interpretations of contemporary and classic texts, there is yet another theory that stems from here. In *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales*,³⁷ the other side to Barthes' argument is given. It is said here that once a particular text is written, thanks to the advanced technology available nowadays, there will be multiple reviews, re-reviews interpretations and misinterpretations [if one may say so] that the texts are opened up to. This leads to a media hype that circulates around the series, in this case, *Harry Potter*.

No matter what the case is, the reality of the situation is that writers do “lose control” over their creations, and are “no longer in touch with their work” (“Media-hyping of fairy tales” 205).³⁸ This means that in the swirling maelstrom of media hype, the “integrity” of the literature, the author's intended “essential meaning” is lost. While some might argue that the author cannot control all possible interpretations of his/her creation; it is also true that without the essence, literature loses the sublime quality that it ordinarily has. It then merely becomes another source of low-quality entertainment, much like comic books like *Archie* and teen books like *Sweet Valley High*.

If Gupta's words are taken to be true, then it should be accepted that the hype surrounding the *Harry Potter* series, which is increased by the hype surrounding each of the films on the books—is what makes the works stand apart from the readers or the audiences. It is the hype that takes away the essence of the work; and only by “deflating the hype” can the true intentions of the author behind creating the work, and the essence of the work itself, be wholly revealed.

Since the books begin to get quite long in length from the third book in the series onwards, it becomes difficult to translate it, bit by bit, onto the silver screen. Along with this

³⁷ *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales*, edited by Maria Tatar, includes various essays for the analysis of different fairy tales and their interpretations. The particular essay used here is by Jack Zipes, titled “Media-hyping of fairy tales.”

³⁸ Zipes quotes Barthes, just like Gupta, but in order to show the disadvantages of the “death of the author”, as coined by Barthes.

difficulty comes the dilemma that Rowling's works are largely popular for their descriptive nature, and not all of the details can always be interpreted as intended by her. Therefore, should a novice choose to watch the movie and read the relevant book afterwards, s/he might find it quite difficult to take in.

Another factor that affected the movies was their commercial nature. As filmmakers are mainly concerned with making money, most would not care which parts of the story found their way into the screenplay, as long as these parts ensured the commercial success of the film in question. This could be a reason why important scenes are left out in the films, such as the potion-drinking scene in the climax of the book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling n.p.).³⁹

Perhaps the mistranslation of books into films could be attributed to what is popularly termed as the freedom of the screenplay writer or the filmmaker to interpret the books in any way they choose to; if Barthes' idea is the foundation of the belief that an author is only there to create literature, and the multiple interpretations are the work of all those who make the effort of reading the aforementioned literature. In this scenario, then, audiences should not be judgmental when critiquing a film that is made from a book. Rather, an open mind should be kept. If this cannot be done, then the stories should be read first—so that the essence of the literature is captured in the mind before it has been diluted by its translation onto the silver screen.

³⁹ The movie version of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, in spite of being a huge commercial success, did not include this important scene—whereas the book specified that each of the Hogwarts teachers had provided some shield to guard the Philosopher's Stone; where the potions would have been Snape's shield.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of this paper, my purpose was to highlight the different elements that have worked together to make the *Harry Potter* series successful. In doing so, I wanted to show how at first glance authors may be blinded by the increasing popularity of the work that they create; but if they try to look past it, they can help maintain the integrity of their creation. In this paper, I have also endeavoured to uphold the advent of new technological advances; and how these have made it easier for authors to cloud our perception of their works. I felt that this has occurred because their interest in making more money has made them draw out the heart of their own literature; sucking it metaphorically dry.

Conducting this research has not been a simple task throughout. Most of the research that exists on *Harry Potter* is about Christianity, and how the central theme of the series attests to pagan beliefs and culture. However, in conducting it, I believe I have succeeded in showing through the *Harry Potter* series [and movies] how popularity may drown out the spirit of literature; and Christianity or anti-Christianity is not the only theme in it. I hope that this thesis will help demonstrate how the essence of literature can be restored; and will set a trend in itself for future researches on contemporary literature.

I have also tried to portray how literature itself thrives most when we let our imagination work its magic on paper, or any other medium for that matter. It shows how Rowling was a true genius when she started off with the concept of *Harry Potter*, being able to combine the best of all the genres and sub-genres of all time. *Harry Potter* is merely the tip of the iceberg of popularity. There are many other instances of contemporary and postmodern literature that are being created right in this very moment that may be awaiting a similar fate.

I therefore believe that is the author's duty to create literature without allowing media to bog down his/her ideas; or to spur him/her to create literature undeserving of its title. Our

duty as readers, on the other hand, is to accept the writing with all of its quirks, flaws and nuances; much as we would accept our loved ones. After all, I believe we can truly claim to have progressed when we can give any literature, popular or otherwise, a chance to gain our confidence, by unlocking the cages of our closed minds; and letting our imaginations run wild and free.

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