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# The Magic of Harry Potter

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## Chapter 1: The Magic of Harry Potter

Harry Potter is a world of riddles and secrets, which is to say, a world of hidden and then discovered meanings. Magical objects, magical creatures, things that happen and tasks that are undertaken, are all filled with significance beyond what meets the eye. There are coded instructions, hidden corridors and rooms, unseen doorways and houses, secret passwords and passageways; dreams, visions, and runes to decipher. The very language of the books is filled with codes, puns and puzzles. In fact, all around in the books there are secret worlds we at first miss the signs of. The importance of riddles and secrets is hinted in headings such as "The Very Secret Diary," "Hermione's Secret," "The Riddle House," "The Secret Riddle." There is the Unknowable Room and the Chamber of Secrets. Dumbledore too is revealed at the end to have secrets in his life – "He learned secrecy," as his brother Aberforth accuses, "at our mother's knee" (7:28, 562). Perhaps above all there is the villain, named Tom Riddle. This name is itself a secret behind another name, which is also hidden since most fear to pronounce it, and which, like so many other words and objects in the books, is itself a riddle: Voldemort – meaning, in a play on French, flight- from- death; or perhaps, from German, will-to-death. Or there are further meanings.

For the riddles in Harry Potter tend not to have one solution, but many. In this they are true to literary meaning as such. Literature is a writing that always opens into more and further meanings. The power of literary images and figures, structures and sequences, is to always mean more, to lead down not one path but many, into deeper understandings and new possibilities.<sup>1</sup> To unlock these meanings requires interpretation, and Harry Potter, with its riddles, puzzles, codes and secrets, is also

very much a book about interpretation. It tracks the characters' attempts to identify and penetrate the secrets and riddles, in an active pursuit of meaning which underscores the importance and vitality of interpretation itself. Harry himself is a hero of riddles, not only in his power to solve them, but in who he is and what he and we discover about him. Harry remains in many ways imperfect, familiar, ordinary. But, as in fairy tale heroes, he also has unrecognized value and worth.<sup>2</sup> And this is true not only of Harry, but of other children and people around him. There are secret dimensions in them, and also in ourselves, which the books awaken us to. Riddles summon Harry and the other characters, but also the readers alongside them and in strong identification with them, to efforts of understanding that require constant and ongoing energy and commitment.<sup>3</sup> In this sense the main action in the Harry Potter books, weaving through all others, is interpretation itself. How do we put together the information we receive? According to what expectations and understandings do we approach what we see and experience, and how do these expectations direct us toward one interpretation or another? What do we do with pieces of information that do not fit into our expectations and paradigms?<sup>4</sup> What is the impact if the picture abruptly changes, and what seemed to mean one thing instead means another, in an altogether unexpected and overturning design?

And indeed the Harry Potter books are full of suddenly changing interpretations. What looked like one thing turns out to be another. A character who seemed good turns out to be bad, a bad seeming character, good.<sup>5</sup> A whole course of events proves to be heading in completely unforeseen, indeed misunderstood directions. Earlier books take on utterly different meanings in light of later ones. The meanings of magical objects unfold and alter. But we live now in a world in which long accepted understandings are in fact under constant pressure, and in which we

more and more realize that the key to what we see and know is the patterns of understanding we bring to experience, not some given facts whose meanings are clear and stable. Harry Potter reflects our contemporary world and our sense of living in it, in its complicated, dangerous, and often unexpected turns and challenges.

In many ways the Potter books are classically patterned as quests, but in the broadest sense what Harry and those around him pursue are secrets they are trying to find out and riddles they are trying to unravel. In this sense the quest is the act of interpretation itself. What the books also show is that interpretation is never-ending, since the world we live in is one of meanings we never exhaust. There are always further meanings and understandings beyond us. Our interpretations can always be changed, as we encounter experiences we never suspected were even possible.<sup>6</sup> This wonder of ever new interpretation, opening new perceptions and understandings of ourselves, of others, and of the world we live in, is the greatest power of literature, and the ultimate magic of the Harry Potter books.

### I. Ordinary Worlds and Magic Ones

Most books of magic take place in a world entirely separate from the ordinary one, to which ordinary people, if there are any, are somehow transported. Tolkein's The Lord of the Rings, for example, is set in a separate Middle Earth. C. S. Lewis's Narnia Books transport British children to the land of Narnia. Or, magical characters are introduced into our world, as happens with Mary Poppins.<sup>7</sup> In Harry Potter, unusually, Rowling builds a magic world that not only exists alongside the ordinary one but also within it, so that the two constantly penetrate each other.<sup>8</sup> The magic world is hidden from the Muggle one – officially, through the International Law of

Secrecy introduced in 1689 in order to protect wizards from Muggles. Yet London is filled with sudden openings and hidden avenues into the magic world, for those who know where to look and what to do and say: Platform Nine and Three Quarters at King's Cross Station; 12 Grimmauld Place, unnoticed between 11 and 13 – an irregularity that the street has gotten used to; the broken telephone booth that serves as visitor's entrance into the Ministry of Magic; the closed-for-refurbishment shop front (Purge & Dowse Ltd) where a mannequin will beckon entry into St. Mungo's Hospital. Farther north, Hogwarts appears to the Muggle eye as a ruined castle with a "danger – no entrance" sign warning visitors away. The other schools are similarly hidden. Scattered villages, such as Godric's Hollow, harbor invisibly among its cottages and monuments and graveyards, the families and histories of wizards. Anywhere we go we may be stumbling across, or rather walking unknowingly by, entryways into this other world. The Leaky Cauldron, the pub scrunched invisibly between two storefronts, leads, through tapping on bricks in its yard, into Diagon Alley. But the leaky cauldron is itself an image of the whole magic world, which is porous, penetrable; or rather, the ordinary world is (Percy Weasley's compulsive campaign against leaky cauldrons comically underscores the futility of such an effort.)

Magic in Harry Potter works in two directions. There is the penetration of magic into the ordinary world, so that Britain is shown to be a world full of hidden mystery. But there is also the portrayal of the magic world with a concrete detail and exactness that, in a kind of inverse realism, makes its workings seem vividly actual. This is not, however, in order to create an alternative world separate from the ordinary one, but to reflect and interpret the real world.<sup>9</sup> The Potter world enchants not because it is so alien, but because it is so familiar. On one side this opens a sense of wonder and of mystery, of the inexhaustible possibilities inherent in but ordinarily

hidden in reality. On the other, the magic world duplicates conditions in the actual world, mirroring it in ways that can be wish-fulfilling but also nightmare-haunted, an alternative space but also one that everywhere turns us back towards and into the reality we inhabit.

The central scene of magical events for Harry through most of the books is the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry Potter is often described as a boarding-school book in a long line of them, which of course it is.<sup>10</sup> But what is the attraction of school-books in the first place? The school, especially the boarding school, offers an image of a world with its own society, its own rules, its own geographies of buildings and campuses, its own authorities and hierarchies and activities and subjects of study. School for everyone is to some extent a second world; the boarding school more so. Yet, although apart from it in specifically demarcated ways, school also remains part of the outside world, of home, or of Muggles.

The realistic details that serve to bind Magical school life to ordinary reality are extensive and elaborate. Hogwarts has courses and textbooks, studying and exams, sports and clubs (Charm Club seems to be a pun on Charm School), cliques and rivalries, punishments and detentions. It has its fads and fashions. When Harry asks Lupin about the Levicorpus jinx, Lupin grows nostalgic: "Oh that one had a great vogue during my time at Hogwarts. . . It was very popular. . . you know how these spells come and go" (6: 16 336). There are carefully detailed scholarly journals, such as Transfiguration Today, Charms in Charming, The Practical Potioneer (7:2, 17) as well as a whole library of books used in school and elsewhere (Molly has her own preferred household reference books). Charms and Transfigurations lessons have all the difficulties of mastering any school assignments. Neville accidentally transfers

his ears to a cactus. His hedgehog, transfigured into a pincushion, cringes every time a pin comes near it (4:15, 233). Exams can go wrong. In a Transfiguration test to change a teapot into a turtle, one student worries hers "still had a spout for a tail, what a nightmare; (3:16, 317); another asks: "were the tortoises supposed to breathe steam?" As to Potions, their effects are most carefully calibrated and regulated. The Lucky Potion, Slughorn warns, if taken "in excess causes giddiness, recklessness and dangerous overconfidence and is a banned substance in organized competitions. . . sporting events, for instance, examinations, or elections" (6: 9,187-8). The Euphoria potion has side effects: "You've added just a sprig of peppermint, haven't you? A stroke of inspiration, of course that would tend to counterbalance the occasional side effect of excessive singing and nose-tweaking." Love potions must be used within date. The use of Veritaserum, the Truth potion, is carefully controlled and requires Ministry authorization (4:27, 516).<sup>11</sup>

The Hogwarts school curriculum not only mimes the sorts of schedule and concerns about it characteristic of non-magical schooling (including vivid accounts of exam-anxiety), but incorporates – and in doing so brings into complex mutual reflection – magical and non-magical history. Rowling has said that, although never herself wanting to be a witch, in inventing the Potter world "I've learned a ridiculous amount about alchemy. Perhaps much of it I'll never use in the books, but I have to know in detail what magic can and cannot do in order to set the parameters and establish the stories' internal logic." Magic in fact has been a part of normative history. The Philosopher's Stone was genuinely sought by natural philosophers, including Nicholas Flamel (died 1418). When Hermione investigates the "local history of witchcraft" on a holiday in France (3:1, 11), she is doing concrete historical

research. All too real are the persecutions recounted in Bathilda's History of Witchcraft, even if the magical community has its own viewpoint of them:

Non-magic people were afraid of magic in medieval times, but not very good at recognizing it. On the rare occasion that they did catch a real witch or wizard, burning had no effect whatever. The witch or wizard would perform a basic Flame Freezing Charm (3:1, 2).

Yet as "Babbitt Rabbit" in Beedle the Bard shows, the witchhunts were fully violent and the outcomes stunningly bloodthirsty. Here magical and non-magical history do not so much double each other as intersect. Historical witch persecutions in the Renaissance serve as the background to the Statute of Secrecy. And witches, to the extent they were hunted, tortured and burned, are very real actors in normative history.<sup>12</sup>

Consistently through the books magic is clearly a mirroring figure for contemporary technology.<sup>13</sup> The devices of magic in many cases reenact technological apparatus on which we daily rely. This reflection is underscored by Arthur Weasley, who is constantly marveling at the ingenuity of Muggles as they manage without wizardry through their own mechanical, electrical and other technological contrivances.<sup>14</sup> Muggle machinery cannot be employed within the wizarding world since magic interferes with their functioning. And magic, like technology – or, technology like magic – requires training to master both the extent and the limits of its powers, what it can and cannot accomplish, and the responsibility and morality of its uses. As Dumbledore tells the boy Tom Riddle when interviewing him before his entry into Hogwarts, "we teach you not only to use magic, but to control it" (6: 13, 273). The image of school itself makes central this effort to learn not only the power of magic but also the dangers of its misuse, the need to control and direct the power it bestows. This power of magic for good or evil, depending on its uses and controls, puzzles the Muggle Prime Minister on his learning that the



Wizarding world is at war: "You can do magic! Surely you can sort out anything."

But (ex-) Minister of Magic Fudge answers: "The trouble is, the other side can do magic, too" (6: 1, 18).

## II. Dursleys and Weasleys

If the magic world mirrors the Muggle one, the Muggle one in turn is penetrated by magic. This is the case despite the Muggle world's insensate inability to perceive the magic surrounding and within it, indeed, its adamant resistance to magic and refusal to acknowledge it. This non-magical militancy is embodied in the Dursleys. The Dursleys do everything in their power to seal their home against Harry's magical presence. Theirs is the struggle to keep out any world other than their own. They guard the borders and limits of their own reality like a tightly shut box. This is the essence of Dursleyism: to resist any intrusion, any expansion, any shadow or any brightness beyond the world of their very tidy, very clean suburban house and lawn.<sup>15</sup> Life is a job with drills, dinner hour and television. The Dursley battle against Harry goes beyond simple dislike or even resentment at a burden thrust upon them. It is rooted in this rejection of anything beyond their own horizon, anything that challenges their interpretation of their world.

Yet in their efforts to limit and control magic, they fail. Harry's magical nature stubbornly escapes their attempts to suppress him, like steam from a teakettle. They close him in a cupboard under the stairs, a strong image for repression both parental and psychological, and lock him in his room, with bars. They starve him and leave him behind when they go out, and treat him as if he doesn't exist when they are in. They ask him to disappear, as at their suck-up dinner party. They are determined, as they announce, not to "tolerate mention of your abnormality under this roof" (2: 1,

2). "Didn't we swear when we took him in we'd stamp out that dangerous nonsense?" (1: 3, 36).

But magic penetrates the tidy, compulsive Dursley world. However they try to ignore "that strange and mysterious things would be happening all over the country" (1: 1, 2), Harry arrives on their doorstep, sternly watched by a cat reading a map. Letters to Hogwarts invade the closed crannies of their sealed-shut home. Mrs. Figg, who they count on to keep Harry out of the way, turns out to be a Squib ("Of course I know Dumbledore, who doesn't know Dumbledore?" (5:2, 21)). The escape of Sirius Black is reported on their news (3:2, 16). Dementors appear in an alleyway of their comfortable suburb of Little Whinging. By the last book, the Dursleys are driven from home and work, assigned magical protectors whose CVs they can't inspect. Not only their lives, but the entire non-magical world has lost its boundedness against the uncanny. The events on the television "aren't accidents – the crashes and explosions and derailments and whatever else has happened since we last watched the news. People are disappearing and dying and he's behind it – Voldemort" (7:3, 34). Muggles, reported as dead from a gas leak, are really victims of the Killing Curse (7: 22, 439), just as Pettigrew's attack on Sirius was originally reported as a gas explosion (3:3, 40). "The Vanishing Glass" – the title of the chapter in which we first see Harry perform magic when he sets free the boa constrictor at the zoo – suggests, as so many chapter titles do, not just this event but a whole topic: that of the disappearing barrier between the ordinary world and one that is uncanny, mysterious, marvelous and also untamed and challenging to norms and securities.

The Dursleys incarnate not only coercive conformity, but a willful interpretive refusal. They are bad readers, glued to interpretive frameworks that refuse to acknowledge or address any anomalies that challenge them.

At the opposite pole from them are the Weasleys. "Life in the Burrow was as different as possible from life on Privet Drive. The Dursleys liked everything neat and ordered; the Weasleys' house burst with the strange and unexpected" (2: 3, 40). If the Dursleys offer a severely normal view with no room for magic, the Weasleys offer a magic view into the Muggle world. As Hermione says of Muggle Studies, "it is fascinating to study them from the wizarding point of view" (3:4, 57). Arthur Weasley is endlessly enchanted with Muggle artifacts: "Ingenious really how many ways Muggles have found of getting along without magic" (2:4, 42). Muggle things become strange puns in his mouth: firelegs for arms, fellytone for telephone, eclectic for electric, escapators for escalators (2: 3, 30). Though Arthur himself is employed in the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, "if he raided our house he'd have to put himself under arrest," as Fred says. On the other hand, the Weasleys open a critical view onto the Muggle world. When Harry asks about doctors at St. Mungo's Hospital, Ron answers: "Doctors? Those Muggle nutters that cut people up? Nah, they're healers" (5:22, 484). There is in fact an elaborate and meticulously thought-through medical system, with different Departments for different magical ailments and cures: Artefact Accidents, Creature-Induced Injuries, Magical Bugs, Potion and Plant Poisoning, Spell Damage, all completely hidden from Muggle view.

Arthur Weasley marvels at Muggle blindness to magic. Explaining jinxes that make keys shrink, he observes: "Of course, it's very hard to convict anyone because no Muggle would admit their key keeps shrinking – they'll insist they just keep losing it. Bless them, they'll go to any lengths to ignore magic, even if it's staring them in the face" (2: 3, 38). The Weasleys are as open to experience as the Dursleys are closed. They are equally accepting of Muggles, Muggle-borns, half-bloods and half-breeds. Proudly, they are blood-traitors, rejecting the categories that give rise in the

books to hatred and violence and evil. Fred and George particularly are twin principles of irreverence, human Bludgers, a carnivalesque force battering arbitrary rules and social barriers, puncturing pompousness and defying convention. Their honesty and mockery become a moral and political weapon against Umbridge in Book 5. "We reckon a bit of mayhem—" said George. "is exactly what our dear new Head deserves," said Fred" (5:28, 553). Their quickly legendary "flight to freedom" serves as a model of dissent, protest, and resistance.

Yet the Weasleys' world is susceptible to the concerns and troubles of the Muggle one. The magic world is no more sealed off than the Muggle one is. Arthur's career suffers from the politics of the Ministry, where his Muggle sympathies are frowned upon. On Ron, Fred and George's stealing the car to rescue Harry from the Dursleys, Molly screeches: "You could have died, you could have been seen, you could have lost your father his job" (2: 3, 33). And while scorning the categories of blood purity, pointing out how artificial they are – without intermarriage the wizard population would dwindle to nothing – even the Weasleys "don't mention" a second cousin accountant (1: 6, 94). Nor do they question the enslavement of the house-elves.

But the Weasleys are not entrapped in their prejudices or the boundaries of their world. Theirs is a project of reinterpretation and open categories. Ron in the end recognizes the personhood of the elves. The Weasleys welcome into their family life Hermione, the Muggle-born, Fleur, the part- Veela, Harry the orphan; also Lupin the werewolf and Hagrid the half-giant. Bill works with goblins (and later is bitten by a werewolf), Charlie with dragons, Arthur with the Muggle world. The Weasley family itself is a strong image of difference and argument and independence within equally strong commitments, loyalties, and love. Molly and Arthur dramatize that disagreement and contention do coexists with attachment. In the multi-voiced, each

singing his/her own version of the Hogwart's anthem, Fred and George, choose an especially eccentric funeral dirge. Harmony does not require unity. The Weasley's seven siblings are strong contrasting images against the seven Horcruxes of Voldemort. Voldemort's are torn pieces of his own soul in a fruitless self-reproduction. The Weasley siblings realize relationship, not replication, with all the contention and revision this entails. Percy, breaking the family bonds, is also permitted to return to them. As to Ginny, as sister in the family she stands as counter-image against Voldemort's mother Merope, who is abjectly under her father and brother's control. Ginny utterly refuses her brothers' efforts to oversee her doings.

### III. Word Riddles

The wizarding world has many kinds of magic; but through and in some sense founding all of them is the magic of words. Not only the spells, but the magical objects and persons are made of word play. The Harry Potter books are abundant with word puzzles and puns; portmanteau words, so named by Lewis Carroll, where one word is made out of combinations of other words; anagrams, where the letters of words are reordered; word play with multiple languages; as well as crossing references to other literatures, myths, and lore. When the Weasleys come to take Harry from the Dursleys so he can go with them to the World Quidditch Cup, they have to blast their way through the Dursleys' boarded-up chimney. Mr. Weasley tries to explain: "I had your fireplace connected to the Floo Network. . . I've got a useful contact at the Floo Regulation Panel and he fixed it for me. . . I'll light a fire to send the boys back, and then I can repair your fireplace before I Disapparate." Harry is "ready to bet that the Dursleys hadn't understood a single word of this" (4: 4, 45). Harry Potter creates not only a special world, but also a special language, in which

there are, as with government and history and school and other matters, strange reflections of our ordinary ways with words.

Harry Potter is, firstly, densely packed with puns, anagrams, and portmanteaus. One of the most important is "Pensieve," combining a word for thoughtful, pensive, with the word sieve, meaning to filter: here to filter thoughts, which is what the Pensieve does. There is a further pun in that entering the Pensieve involves "diving into other people's memories" (6: 20, 430). This metaphor for memory becomes the magical act of plunging into the Pensieve and other people's pasts. The "Floo" Network plays on chimney flue and flew, the past tense of flight. "Apparate" and "Disapparate" combine the words appear, disappear, and evaporate. The "Knight Bus" rescues like a Knight in the night. "Knockturn Alley" is nocturnal in its Dark Arts, which can give you a hard knock or turn. "Diagon Alley" re-spells diagonally. "Spellotape" reminds of the magic spell cast by scotch tapes. "Grimmauld Place" is a grim old place. "Gringotts" suggests greed for gold ingots. Hermione works out the pun on bugging, discovering Rita Skeeter to be a beetle (4:28, 546). "Remembrall" is a remembrance-ball. "Portkey" is at once door key (port is French for door), porthole to another place, the key to transport. "Flutterby" (the bush) is an anagram for butterfly. "Erised" is an anagram for desire. "Scrimgoeur" seems to combine grim with coeur, French for heart; although Rowling also hints that it is a portmanteau combination of "scraggy and grim" (7:7, 121). "Boggart" is a play on bog, and perhaps on mind-boggling. "Durmstrang" plays on Sturm und Drang, the German Romantic movement. "Horcrux," as will be further discussed, may suggest something crucial (crux) projected outside (French de hors). "Hallow" means to make holy. "Hogwarts" itself is a portmanteau word, deflating hoary institutions. "Dementor" is one of a group of words in the books based in the Latin root word

"mens," for mind. Dementors distort the mind, "Legilimens" reads it, and "Occlumens" closes or occludes it. "Aguamenti" summons water (aqua) with an act of mind.

Harry Potters' magic spells are of course, as here, mainly Latin, further embedded in word play. "Expelliarmus," the Disarming Charm, comes from the word expel, "Protego," the Shield Charm, from protect. "Expecto Patronum" expects the Patron-guardian. Hermione casts spells of protection around their tent when the friends are in flight and hiding – "Protego Totalum," total protection, "Salvia Hexia," hexing the forest, "Mufflatio," muffling sounds. "Reparo" repairs, "Confundis" confounds. "Veritaserum" forces its drinker to tell veritas, the truth. "Imperio," the curse of control, commands imperiously, "Cruciato," the torture curse, is excruciating. As to the Killing Curse, "Aveda Kadavra" sounds like the one spell ignorant Muggles have heard of, Abra Cadabra, and makes it deadly (Kadavra suggests cadaver, a corpse).

Chapter titles involve a range of word play, puns, and symbolic meanings: "Aunt Marge's Big Mistake" is the mistake of making her big. "Grim Defeat" recalls Sirius's Dog Animagus shape as the Grim omen. "Elf Tails" tells tales of tailing. "Will and Won't" puns on the will in which Sirius has left Harry his house on Grimmauld Place and Kreacher, who "won't" accept Harry as master. "A Sluggish Memory" involves Slughorn's memory, which he has tampered with to make it sluggish. Other chapter titles are often symbolic, pointing to larger meanings beyond what happens immediately in them. "The Vanishing Glass" suggests the vanishing line between magic and Muggle worlds, and is the first of many glasses and mirrors. "Seen or Unforeseen" signals the books deep involvement with prophesy. "Beyond the Veil" actually involves the impossibility of achieving this. "Spinner's End"

weaves a spider-like web around Snape's character. "After the Burial" points to the rebirths that are the books' deepest structures. Asked about "King's Cross," Rowling replies: "The name works rather well, and it has been established in the books as the gateway between two worlds, and Harry would associate it with moving on between two worlds (don't forget that it is Harry's image we see, not necessarily what is really there.)"

Rowling provides a set of proverbs and idioms rooted in her magic reality: Don't cry over spilt potion; wouldn't touch you with a ten foot broomstick; don't count your owls before they are delivered. St. Mungo's has posted medical sayings: "A Clean Cauldron keeps Potions from becoming Poisons; Antidotes are Anti-Don'ts Unless Approved by a Qualified Healer (5: 22, 484). Ron quotes wizard superstitions: "Jinx by twilight, undone by midnight;" "Wand of elder, never prosper." (7:21, 414). Then there are terms that grow out of wizard experience. The wand produces wandlight, the arm holding it becomes the wandarm, trees that produce proper woods are wandtrees. Snake language is Parseltongue, speakers are Parselmouths. Goblins speak Gobbledegook – a word in common circulation restored to magical contexts.

Perhaps the most obvious word magic involves the names Rowling invents or takes from familiar places. Rowling's name symbolism is very wide ranging. Some names are plainly allegorical. Kreacher obviously stands for all creatures and our treatment of them. Malfoy means: bad (mal) faith (foi), a name that directly points to Spenser and traditions of allegory, as we will see. Draco means dragon, as is clear from the Hogwarts Motto: Draco Dormiens Nunquam Titillandus, Hogwarts-Latin for: don't disturb sleeping dragons. Draco's eventual son's name, Scorpius, carries on this noxious-lizard tradition. Lucius suggests Lucifer, and Narcissa narcissism.



Bellatrix, her sister, means the tricks of beauty (French: belle), and/or of war (Latin: bellum). The surname LeStrange is obviously strange. Slytherins are slithering. Crabbe and Goyle, Malfoy's henchmen, are crabby and gargoylish. Grindelwald, the Dark wizard, recalls Grindell, the monster defeated in the Old English epic, Beowulf, while the Battle of Grunwald pitted Poland against the Teutonic Knights, one of the earliest German forces of invasion attempting to control Polish territory. Dursleys are dastardly and thirsty (German: Durst); while their address, Privet Drive, projects the intensely private, self-interested drive of its inhabitants. Bode means portend, something the Unmentionable worker in the Department of Mysteries clearly does in his attempt to resist the Imperius Curse cast by Lucius on him. Quirrell is quarrelsome and querulous and quibbling. Gilderoy Lockhart is falsely gilds his actions with others, has golden locks, and has a locked heart. Perhaps, in the context of the books, he is linked to lockets, which conceal dangerous forces.<sup>16</sup> Peeves is peevish, master of chaos (Rowling explains: "He is a spirit of chaos that entered the building long ago and has proved impossible to eradicate"). Mr. Filch is a sneak. His first name, Argus, is a giant with one hundred eyes in classical mythology. Umbridge: taking umbrage as the tendency to take offense is a form of pride and revenge. Dolores, meaning sorrows, is what people feel in encountering her. Gaunt, like Crouch, aptly states the characters of their owners. Pius Thicknesse piously marches "along the thickly carpeted corridor" of the Ministry (7:13, 247). Pettigrew grows petty. Griphook the goblin is grasping. Mundungus is 'dung' for short. Snape is a portmanteau word combining snake and snoop and snide and snipe and sneak. Severus is both severe and severed, cut in two.

Flitwick, the Charms professor, reflects his subject in his flickering, wicklike, flitting name. Slughorn suggests hitting and sloth, perhaps also horning in on power.

Slug Club combines two aggressive words meaning to hit. Lupin means wolf, and Remus was suckled by wolves in the legends founding Rome, as was Romulus, Lupin's code name on the illegal radio broadcast Potterwatch (where Lee Jordan is called River, as fits both his names, Kingsley Shacklebolt (bolting away from shackles?) is called Royalty, and Fred, after the insult of Rodent, is changed to Rapier.

Xenophilius means, in Greek, lover (philo) of the strange (xeno). In him this is both a good and a bad quality. Lovegood seems more apt for his daughter Luna, whose reputation for lunacy is shown in her nickname "Loony." Sirius is, fittingly, both the dog constellation and serious (as Vernon Dursely mishears). The Black family starts off dark, but in the end, in the persons of Sirius and Regulus and Andromeda and Tonks, turns to the side of light. Moody is indeed moody. Shunpike is a comment on the driving. Madame Maxime is, well, maximal. Sanguini, the vampire, comes from the Latin word for blood. Hagrid, perhaps related to the word hagridden, Rowling has said is old English for having a bad night. He is also Rubeus – perhaps in reference to rubies, which adorn Gryffindor's sword. There seems a general tendency in the books to give French names to darker characters and Anglo-Saxon ones to brighter ones. Dumbledore is Old English bumblebee as against Voldemort, which is basically French. Draco Malfoy similarly stands against Harry Potter.

Dumbledore's is a comical name, as Rowling underscores when Mrs. Cole, the patroness of the orphanage where Tom Riddle grew up, confuses it with Dumberton and Dunderbore (6: 13, 269). Its meaning of bumblebee has a hint toward bumbling, although also a host of virtues as well as a hidden sting. Dumbledore interestingly rhymes with Voldemort, has the same rhythm, even while they stand deeply opposed against each other. The name suggests Dumbledore's own lack of pompousness, his

whimsical humor, and also perhaps the word "humble." On the other hand, Albus is a gracious name which derives from alb, meaning white, and through that root to Alba – a song of sunrise, and Aubade, a poem of parting lovers at dawn.

Hermione, Rowling says, is a Shakespearean name. "I consciously set out to choose a very unusual name for Hermione because I didn't want a lot of very hard working little girls to be teased if ever the book was published because she is a very recognizable type, to which I belonged when I was younger." But it is also derived from Hermes, the herald of the gods (although Hermione irritably declares "I am not an Owl" when she is asked to pass messages between feuding Ron and Harry).

Why Weasley? That Rowling has weasel in mind is evident from Mr. Weasley's Patronus which takes that shape, Ron's fury when Zacharias Smith asks if Harry's trying to "weasel out" of teaching Defense, and Fred's refusal to be called Rodent on Potterwatch. The Burrow, their home, fits too. When Mr. Crouch calls Percy 'Weatherby' we are reminded how odd their name really is. Perhaps Weasley refers to the Catweazle series featuring an "eccentric, incompetent, disheveled 11<sup>th</sup> century wizard caught in the year 1970, who must solve a 12 part riddle, and who mistakes all modern technology for powerful magic. But the Weasley first names suggest nobility and royalty: Arthur, William and Charles, Frederick and George all are the names of kings. Percival was a Knight of the Round Table, Ronald is from *Rögnvaldr* "Having the Gods' Power," (*rögn* "gods," lit. "decreeing powers" pl. of *regin* "decree" + *valdr* "ruler"). Ginny, we learn in Book 7 is short not for Virginia, but Ginevra, a form of Guinevere, and means Junipers in Italian. It is the name of a portrait by Leonardo of a woman who was a humanist in her own right and was red-headed (I have no idea if Rowling had this in mind). Molly suggests "mollycoddling"

(6: 5,90), also mollify, soften, which is one of her roles, although it often takes the guise of indignation: she is no softy, as we see in the end.

Perhaps (I like to think this) Weasley is a kind of plural form of "we." Perhaps it is, like Fred and George who transform Percy's Head Boy badge into Bighead Boy (3:4, 67), intended to mock high pretensions. Is it, more generally, to make high the lowly? This would work in direct opposition to the Malfoys. The Weasley's are poor, and they are the ultimate blood-traitors, rejecting resolutely the blood-purity that fuels so much evil.

The name of Voldemort is especially hedged with power. An anagram, it is built out of the letters of the name he wishes to disown: "Tom Marvolo Riddle" becomes "I am Lord Voldemort." Voldemort sees his name as a mask, not a revelation, a way of hiding from himself and from others. He wished from the first, Dumbledore explains, "to be different, separate, notorious. He shed his name . . . and created the mask of "Lord Voldemort" behind which he has hidden so long" (6: 13, 277). He despises his given name "Tom" as ordinary.

Voldemort's name is an arm of his terror. In the very first chapter of the first book Dumbledore tells McGonagall: "I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort's name" (1: 1, 11). Later he tells Harry himself: "Call him Voldemort. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself" (1: 17, 298). Yet Snape warns Harry against naming Voldemort, telling him "Professor Dumbledore is an extremely powerful wizard. While he may feel secure enough to use the name. . . the rest of us. . . (5:24, 532). Bellatrix at the Ministry hisses at Harry: "you dare speak his name" (5:35, 784). And in fact in the seventh book the name becomes Taboo, exposing and stripping of protection anyone who uses it. This is how Harry is trapped and captured (7:22, 445). "Don't say the

name!" Ron shouts, "it feels like a – a jinx, or something. . . Just show You-Know-Who some respect" (7:14, 273). To Voldemort himself, however, people are "worthless nameless men," (7:27, 550). Dumbledore insists on calling him Tom when Voldemort comes to request the job teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts, affirming Dumbledore's freedom from intimidation: "to me you will always be Tom Riddle." This is a "refusal to allow Voldemort to dictate the terms of the meeting" (6: 20, 441-2). Harry, too, returns to calling him Riddle in the last duel.

Voldemort's is the most powerful name, but it is also an emblem of the power of words themselves. Hermione's naming Ron is what makes it possible for him, through the Deluminator, to find his way back to her and Harry after he has walked out on them in Book 7 (7:19, 384). Harry's saying Ron's name also gives Ron the strength to confront the locket-Horcrux: "The sound of his name seemed to act like a stimulant" (7:19, 375). Ron pronounces Hermione's name (Er-mi-nee) as a sign of recovery from the mead-poisoning, (6: 19, 402). Grawp calls "Hermy," remembering her name as a mark of his continuing growth when he rescues her and Harry from the Centaurs (5:33, 758). Snape smiles when Lily pronounces his name (7:33, 667). R.A.B., the initials of Regulus Arcturus Black, is a clue to solving the riddle of the locket-Horcrux. Dumbledore's signature is the clue that leads to the discovery of the Hallows (7:20, 394), and his first name, Albus is the password to tuning into the underground broadcast, Potterwatch (7:22, 438). The name Peverell is what unlocks the secret of the Hallows, connecting the ring to the Resurrection Stone. Tom Riddle tracks his lineage through his given name Marvolo. Harry names Dumbledore in defiance against the diary-Riddle in the sequence that leads to defeating him. It is the name Gregorovitch that alerts Harry to Voldemort's quest for the Elder Wand, the name Peverell that leads him to connect the ring-Horcrux to the Resurrection Stone.

As to Harry Potter, many have connected Harry with Shakespeare's Prince Hal who then turns into a great king. But the name itself, as Petunia Dursley sniffs when first mentioning it in Book 1, is a "Nasty, common name, if you ask me." Tom Riddle, as Dumbledore points out, had "contempt for anything that tied him to other people, anything that made him ordinary" (6: 13, 277). This key to the riddle of Voldemort's evil, is also one to Harry's difference from him: recognizing the ordinary, valuing it, as not a closed book but an open quest. Potter, a no less common name, may also suggest the art of creating patterns out of matter, a talent Harry has beyond any specifically magical ones.

#### IV. Magic Figures

Not only words, but many of the creatures and objects in the Harry Potter books carry multiple meanings. As author of Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, for example, Rowling is fully attuned to the meanings of animal figures. There are many in the books. It is very significant that Lupin is Harry's teacher in the ways to defend against the Dementor and the other Dark beings. Lupin is a werewolf. As becomes clear in the definition of werewolves in Fantastic Beasts and where to Find Them, a werewolf is an image of the double nature of human beings, their potential for both good and evil: "the otherwise sane and normal wizard or Muggle afflicted transforms into a murderous beast." (The Fantastic Runespoor, a snake with three heads, clearly suggests divided natures. One head is a planner, one a dreamer, and one a critic – whose fangs are "extremely venomous. The Runespoor rarely reaches a great age, as the heads tend to attack each other," with the two others often ganging up on and destroying the critic-head). The most horrible example of werewolves is

Fenrir Greyback, who out of resentment, revenge, and destructive appetite itself, seeks only to bite others and doom them to his own fate.

In Lupin's case, his being a werewolf seems more like a disease, a dreadful, infectious plague that came upon him in tragic ways. His efforts to cope with his condition reminds of the difficulties people with disability face, given also the prejudices often directed against them. Lupin feels forced out of society, as if he must live apart almost as in a leper colony. And it makes him feel as if he is himself guilty, or unworthy. In the final book, Lupin thinks about abandoning his family, feeling undeserving to have one, frightened of what he may do or mean to them.

The Animagi in the books – animals into which some wizards, with unusual skill, can transform – obviously reflect the Transfigured person in each case. McGonagall is stern cat, Skeeter is beetle, Sirius, with his bark-like laugh is Padfoot the dog, and the revolting Pettigrew, with his "affinity" with filthy creatures that Voldemort mocks, is Wormtail the rat (4:33, 655). The Patronuses take shapes that fit those who cast them: James as Stag for Harry, and, as we learn at last, Lily as Doe for Snape. Rowling explains in an interview that the Patronus can take the form of someone deeply loved, since this features so centrally in the joyous thought that summons it. Umbridge's Patronus, on the other hand, takes on the sickening figure of sweet kittens.

"People can be a bit stupid about their pets," Hagrid tells Ron when he quarrels with Hermione over Cruickshank's (apparent) killing of Scabbers (3:14, 274). Hagrid should know. Himself almost monstrous in appearance, especially when he puts on his horrible hairy suit for special occasions, he is yet the most gentle character in the books, and grants this possibility to all creatures. His monsters, then, mirror him, in their hidden or still to be discovered value and the gift of looking for it.

Many pets in Harry Potter mirror their masters: Mrs. Norris the cat, with "lamp-like eyes so very like her masters," has uncanny immediate communication to Filch. (4:9, 125; 25, 468). Crookshank, at least part- Kneazle (as suggested in Fantastic Beasts) in his ability to detect the true nature of other creatures, also recalls Hermione, watching Ron and Harry as "Hermione might look if she knew they weren't doing their homework properly (4:14, 222). Neville's toad Trevor, like Neville himself, is easily, comically lost, especially at the outset. Hedwig, Harry's snowy owl, is also, if one comes to think of it, rather like him, in her whiteness of devotion, her loyalty, the moodiness that never interferes in her fierce sense of duty. Her death, according to a Rowling interview, represents "a loss of innocence and security," "the end of childhood." Harry mourns her as a link that always tied him to the magical world, even while he was at the Dursleys (7:5, 67). The Thestrals seem particularly tied to Luna. Harry sees them only after his experience of death has altered his world, and they are themselves death-like images, although not in a threatening, indeed in an almost – not domestic, they are wildish creatures – but approachable way. They have "skeletal bodies" and black wings, are "completely fleshless, their black coats clinging to their skeletons of which every bone was visible" (5:10, 196). Yet Harry comes to find them beautiful. This is a vision he shares with Luna, who also sees them ("you're as sane as I am" she assures Harry). It is her idea to ride them on the mission to the Ministry.

The character who is closest to a beast is Voldemort. The snake Nagini is both mirror image and extension of her master. Indeed, as we learn later, she is a Horcrux containing part of his soul. Her appetite in eating his victims is a repulsive and horrific allegory of his. But Voldemort is shown in imagery of the beast in other ways. The Basilisk, the monstrous snake concealed in the Chamber of Secrets, is



"like a sort of monster Voldemort – even other monsters didn't want to name it" (2: 15, 281) Harry thinks when he learns of it from Aragog. When Tom Riddle first learns that he is a wizard, his face is "transfigured," not in a way that elevates him but with a "wild happiness" that makes him appear "almost bestial" (6: 13, 271). This occurs again when he learns he can make multiple Horcruxes. His face then shows that wild happiness which made him not more handsome, but "somehow, less human" (6: 23, 499).

The thickness of symbolic texture in the books becomes more and more visible once you start noticing it. Houses and rooms are close reflections of their owners – something true in ordinary life as well. Lockhart's office is filled with his own posturing photographs. Crouch-Moody's Office contains the real Moody's Dark Detectors, the Sneakoscope unplugged to conceal his own deception. Lupin's contain the Dark creatures he will teach the students to confront as he does his own werewolfhood. Slughorn's is falsely expanded and full of luxuries (6: 9, 177). Snape imposes his personality on the Dark Arts room with gruesome pictures of people in agony. Privet Drive sharply contrasts the warm, hospitable, bustling Burrow. Malfoy Manor is an emblem of cold arrogance, Lovegood's house is strangely round (7:20, 397). Especially Sirius's House becomes almost an alter-ego against which he battles, as he struggles with his own family's past and dark forces that, so sadly, at last confine him. Umbridge decorates the Defense office where she gives Harry his torture-detention with lacy doilies and ornamental plates, each with a "foul technicolor kitten" (5:13, 265). As to "The Unknowable Room," it becomes a concentrated image and place of possibility, of the sense there is always something beyond what we can know, and of how reality varies in terms of our needs and attitudes towards it.

Wands, too, conjure the owners. "The wand chooses the wizard" is the rule of wandlore. James's wand, Harry is told, was good for transfiguration, a foreshadowing of his becoming an (unregistered) Animagus (1: 5, 82). Umbridge's is short and stubby (5:12, 239). When Ollivander reviews the wands Harry and Ron have collected at Malfoy's Manor, Bellatrix's is described as "unyielding," Draco's as "reasonably springy," Pettigrew's as "brittle" (7:24, 393). Not much is said about Lockhart's wand, but he does have an enormous peacock quill. These symbolic meanings are hinted in Dumbledore's commentary in Beedle the Bard that "certain wands (and therefore their owners) are supposed to be incompatible. . . or to denote flaws in the owner's characters" (p. 99). The strange power of Harry's wand in his escape from Privet Drive in Book 7 is here partly explained in the sense of wandlorists that "wands do indeed absorb the expertise of those who use them" although in unpredictable ways (p. 101). Harry's wand itself – "nice and supple" – of course is the twin to Voldemort's, both having Fawkes' phoenix feather's at the core.

The Phoenix is associated with Dumbledore. A symbol of rebirth, Harry's first view of Fawkes is when he blows up in Dumbledore's office – "I couldn't do anything" he rushes to tell Dumbledore – the Headmaster explains: Phoenixes "burst into flame when it is time for them to die and are reborn from the ashes" (2: 12, 207). Harry's own phoenix wand will eventually be repaired, as will Harry himself (with an important pun on re-pair, reconnecting with others). But the phoenix remains above all Dumbledore's symbol, and the emblem of the Order of the Phoenix he founds and guides in the hope of renewal out of darkness.

Among the most delightful magic in Harry Potter is the way the portraits and pictures come to life. Photographs wave and smile. Paintings speak and behave with that uncanny realism Rowling gives to her magic world. The password

into Gryffindor becomes "abstinence" after the Fat Lady that guards their porthole with her friend Violet "drank their way through all the wine in that picture of drunk monks down by the Charms corridor" (6: 17, 351). After house-cleaning to welcome the Triwizard guests, "Grimy portraits had been scrubbed much to the displeasure of their subjects, who sat huddled in their frames muttering darkly and wincing as they felt their raw pink faces" (4: 15, 236). Sir Cadogan, who replaces the Fat Lady when she is out for repairs having been slashed by Sirius, "spent half his time challenging people to duels and the rest thinking up ridiculously complicated passwords which he changed at least twice a day. "He's a complete lunatic," Seamus complains, "Can't we get anyone else?" "None of the other pictures wanted the job" Percy answers (3:9,167). Sirius Black's mother seems to be under her own dark enchantment, screeching filth and indignation at suspected betrayals of purity. Only the portraits of former Headmasters of Hogwarts, however, seem to have the privilege, among those who have actually lived, to be able to fully participate in ongoing life (there is, though, the frog-like portrait in the Prime Minister's Office who links the worlds?). Portraits in the Headmaster's office listen and speak and advise. When Dumbledore explains Horcruxes to Harry, "every single one of the old headmasters and headmistresses in the portraits around the walls was awake and listening in on the conversation. A corpulent, red nosed wizard had actually taken out an ear trumpet" (6: 23, 499). Phineas Nigellus sneers and comments, both in the office and at the Black house and, finally, when carried around in Hermione's magically expanded bead bag.

These portraits are themselves windows between worlds. In their vivid details, they make the magic world as real as the non-magic, and the non-magical world seem open, at any moment, to enchantment. They also serve as link between the living and the dead, something of deep importance to the books. Perhaps above

all, as works of art they show the power of imagination to create and shape reality. At King's Cross, when Harry meets with Dumbledore in a world between death and rebirth, Harry asks: "Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?" Dumbledore answers: "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (7:35, 723).

But the greatest art of all remains the art of writing. The magical parchment Hermione requires everyone who joins Dumbledore's Army to sign, holds them to their pledge and punishes breaking it. Luna's golden chain of letters spelling "friends" aids Harry in discovering that she in fact is absent and that her father is trying to entrap them (7: 21, 417).<sup>17</sup> Dumbledore's Will is a roster of riddles. Having launched Harry through clues to finding the Horcruxes in Book 6, he now sets the friends tasks whose very nature they need to discover: Ron, the deluminator which sees into his remorse and shows him how to realize it; Hermione, a book of runes she must decipher, and the recognition among them of a sign that is not a rune, that she needs to read; and Harry, to discover first the riddle of the Snitch and then its meaning. These are quests of interpretation regarding not only their struggle against Voldemort, but with themselves.

But the power of the word includes the misuse of words. One such is Rita Skeeter's reporting. Her Quick-Quotes Quill does not record what is said, but ruthlessly rewrites for her own purposes and self-promotion. Elphias Doge's calling her an "interfering trout" (7:8,152) she distorts to prove he is "gaga . . ." "telling me to watch out for trout" (7:2, 24). Her biography, The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore twists Dumbeldore's story like a writhing snake. Similarly, Umbridge's reports on the teachers she examines is manipulative, injurious, and unjust. "Has to resort to crude sign language" she scribbles for Hagrid after she herself has pretended not to

understand him. She uses writing as an instrument of torture when making Harry inscribe on his own flesh in his own blood "I will not tell lies" in order to force him to do so. Riddle's Diary, which bleeds ink, is an intentionally falsified version of what happened in the Chamber of Secrets, while recording her thoughts in it puts Ginny in the Diary's power, something that any writing can do. The Diary shows the power of words to cast the past in its desired image, controlling how what has happened will be interpreted, understood, and acted on. Another book whose power, and secret, is only gradually revealed is the Half-Blood Prince's Potions Book. This, in a way reminiscent of Riddle's Diary, is a record left by an unknown author which in the course of its pages discloses his inner selfhood, in ways that in turn directs its reader, unbeknownst to himself. Indeed, Ginny reacts very angrily when she overhears that Harry has been "taking orders from something some wrote in a book" (6: 9, 192). Book 7 in turn offers another potent text, investigation of which penetrates every undertaking: the biography of Dumbledore.

There is one moment, a quite dire one, right before Harry's phoenix wand is broken in the desperate battle against Voldemort's snake at Godric's Hollow, when Nagini possesses the shape of Bathilda, who is, significantly, an historian. Harry, having lost his wand, feels it as "a pencil-like something" (7: 17, 341). Opening the possibility of imagined worlds, clearly Rowling's magic wand is her pen.

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<sup>1</sup> On this question the literary value of Harry Potter in many ways rests. A. S. Byatt in "Harry Potter and the Childish Adult" NYT July 7 2003 specifically attacks the Potter books as having "no place for the numinous," and as without any "real sense of mystery, powerful forces, dangerous creatures in dark forests" inhabiting "a world we did not feel we controlled." William Safire likewise dismisses the books in "Besotted with Potter" NYT Jan 27 2000 because he felt that "the Potter series are not written on two levels." Roni Natov' in contrast describes the interpenetration of the worlds of magic and non-magic as suggesting the "way we live on more than one plain, with the life of the imagination and daily life moving in and out of our consciousness," "Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of the Ordinary " The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter ed. Lana Whited (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002 / 2004), 125-139 p. 129. Cf. Elizabeth Shafer who speaks of Harry Potter's "sense of the "mystery of life," of a "dimension beyond the ordinary" and a "wonder transfiguring commonplace experiences," Exploring Harry Potter (Osprey, FL: Beacham Publishing Corp, 2000), p.160

<sup>2</sup> A classic if early discussion of fairy tale structure is Max Leuthi's Max Leuthi, The Fairy Tale as Art Form and Portrait of Man (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Ernelle Fife discusses this reading experience in Harry Potter in terms of C. S. Lewis's An Experiment in Criticism and its emphasis on the reader, which she sees as pointing to the notion of a "hermeneutic narrative" requiring a simultaneous "multiplicity of readings" and multi-levels of meaning which child readers are open to but, Fife claims, adult critics miss. "Reading JK Rowling

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Magically: Creating C.S. Lewis's "Good Reader" Scholarly Studies in Harry Potter: Applying Academic Methods to a Popular Text, ed. Cynthia Whitney Hallett Edwin, Mellen Press Studies in British Literature Vol 99 2005 137-158, p. 139. Mary Pharr "In Medias Res: Harry Potter as Hero-in-Progress," The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter, ed. Lana Whited (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002) 53-66 likewise describes Harry Potter as a narrative of process and education, in which the reader participates, p. 54

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) explores the priority of paradigms in scientific research and interpretation, the way they produce what he calls anomalies, information or experimental results that do not fit into the paradigm as applied in ordinary science, and the event of a "paradigm shift" when a whole new interpretation erupts that does accommodate the anomalies as well as the ordinary science. The classic works on the processes of reading in literary terms are those of Wolfgang Iser, who analyzes and charts how expectations guide reading even as they are not only fulfilled but revised. See The Act of Reading (London: Routledge, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 3 for discussion of these reversals.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Hopkins: "Harry Potter and the Acquisition of Knowledge," Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays, ed. Giselle Liza Anatol Praeger (Westport, Ct; 2003) 25-34 attributes the series' popularity to its having a "hero who has to learn things, as the readers do," p. 33. I do not entirely agree, however, with the editors of Reading Harry Potter, who in their "Introduction," (ix-xxv) claim that the "number of characters and intricate details allow the child reader to feel intellectual power and mastery over materials" (xiii). I believe the books

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also show that mastery is never achieved, for there are always further meanings. At issue is not mastery but mystery.

<sup>7</sup> Rick Riordan's five volume Percy Jackson and the Olympians series also mixes worlds, with a good deal of its creative energy casting mythological characters in contemporary pop culture terms, (NY: Disney Hyperion Books, 2005-2009).

<sup>8</sup> This is also the case with Ursula Leguin, Peter S. Beagle, David Eddings, T.H.White, to name a few. The extent to which Harry Potter does or does not establish a separate world has attracted a great deal of comment. At issue are far-reaching questions about the whole relationship between fictional worlds and social, cultural, and historical experiences surrounding it, of which fantasy presents a kind of limit case. I, however, would argue that the two worlds are not so clearly distinct from each other. Cf. Roni Natov in "Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of the Ordinary " The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter ed. Lana Whited (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002 2004) 125-139 who emphasizes the degree to which the Potter world remains involved in the ordinary one: "although Harry Potter contains global battles of good and evil, yet Rowling is also a novelist, writing about the real world," p. 128. Natov goes on to compare Harry Potter to Lewis, Lenge, Tolkien, and E. Nesbit's Story of the Treasure, as authors J. K. Rowling mentions. Gareth Matthews in " Finding Platform 9 3/4 The idea of a Different Reality" Harry Potter and Philosophy, eds. David Baggett and Shawn E. Klein (Chicago: Open Court, 2004/2005) 174-185, describes Oz and Narnia as more fully separate worlds, while Harry Potter remains part of an ordinary reality, coordinated with our familiar everyday world, p. 179. Richard Bernstein, in



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contrast, in "[The Reality of the Fantasy in the Harry Potter Stories](#) NYT Dec 2 1999 writes that the Potter magical creations seem to be "so divorced from any reality as to kill off the narrative excitement." Colin Manlove [From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England](#) (Cybereditions.com) speaks of the school world as offering the "pleasure of a closed society itself . . . from the sense that all actions will be contained and completed rather than left dissipated or unresolved in the much less tidy or protected world outside;" but also claims that "The fantasy world itself of Hogwarts School for Wizards is not a remote one, but is present within our own as a continuous alternative between platforms 9 and 10 at King's Cross Station." The result is a "perpetual tension of like and unlike gives enduring energy to the books," but Manlove ultimately thinks that the books, "not having a detailed relationship to our own world, [offer] wish fulfillment rather than self-development," p. 191.

Philip Hensher claims that children like the books because they are "reassured by the closed, certain world." "Harry Potter and the Literary Hoax," [The Age](#) 7 Feb 2000. Tom Morris, "The Courageous Harry Potter" [Harry Potter and Philosophy](#) 9-21 sees the magic world as intermingled with but different from the ordinary one," p. 9. Amanda Cockrell, "Harry Potter and the secret Password: Finding our way in the Magical Genre" [Ivory Tower](#) 15-26 sees "Harry Potter as more controversial than any other children's literature" because Rowling "has departed from the imaginary into the real, her story in contemporary England, disturbing those who want the world to stay still." p. 15. Elaine Ostry in "Accepting Mudbloods: The Ambivalent Social Vision of J.K.Rowling's Fairy Tales," [Reading Harry Potter](#) 89-102 speaks of "the faery parallel world" as accessed "only by magic where the laws of the real world

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are suspended or reversed," p. 90. Karen Westman "Specters of Thatcherism The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter, ed. Lana Whited, (Columbia, Missouri; University of Missouri Press, 2002 2004) 305-328 claims the Potter world is not an alternate one, "in fact there is a degree of similarity between the Muggle world of humans and the magical world," p. 305.

Essays comparing Harry Potter to other fantasy works include Steven Barfield, "Of Young Magicians and Growing Up: JKR her critics and cultural infantilism," Scholarly Studies in HP Applying Academic Methods to a Popular Text ed Cynthia Whitney Hallett, Edwin Mellen Press Studies in British Literature Vol 99 2005) 175-197 compares Rowling and Le Guin; "Metaphor and MetaFantasy: Questing for Literary Inheritance in JKR's HP and Sorcerer's Stone" Scholarly Studies in HP Applying Academic Methods to a Popular Text ed Cynthia Whitney Hallett Edwin Mellen Press Studies in British Literature Vol 99 2005, 241-275 compares Rowling and T.H. White. Also Alice Mills, "Archetypes and the Unconscious in Harry Potter and Diana Wynne Jones's Fire and Hemlock and Dogsboddy," Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays, ed Giselle Liza Anatol (Westport, Ct; Praeger 2003 ), 3-14.

<sup>9</sup> Tzvetan Todorov discusses this concrete realism of an imagined world as an aspect of literature of the fantastic, The Fantastic (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> For discussion of Harry Potter's relationship to boarding-school novels, see James Gunn, "Harry Potter as Schooldays Novel" Mapping the World of Harry Potter , ed. Mercedes Lackey Benbella Books Dallas Texas 145-156; Karen Manners Smith "Harry Potter's Schooldays: J.K.Rowling and the British Boarding School Novel." Reading Harry Potter,: David Steege, "Harry

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Potter, Tom Brown and the British School Story"140-156; Pat Pinsent "The Education of a Wizard: Harry Potter and his predecessors" in Ivory Tower; 27- 52 ; Colin Manlove From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England Cybereditions.com sees the setting in a privileged school as " the side of fantasy of wish-fulfilment, the heart of all fairy tales" p.186. The popularity of boarding school stories despite their increasing irrelevance is seen to be due to its presenting "a world which is largely predictable, as real life often is not, and a system whose parameters are well known." Yet the world of Harry Potter is highly destabilized, and the effect of the books is to limit or block the possibility of retreat. In this it is consistent with Manlove's description of 1990s fantasy books as written in a mood of horror and paranoia. For a general discussion of boarding school books, see Isobel Quigly The Heirs of Tom Brown (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> The Ministry itself is a fully bureaucratic enterprise. Its operations and directives, divisions and assignments, are detailed with enormous exactitude. The Ministry's organization includes the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures, The Department of Magical Law Enforcement, of Muggle Artifacts, of Magical Transportation, the Department of Mysteries, the Goblin Liaison Office, the Aurors, the Department of International Cooperation and Magical Games and Sports, of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, including the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad. There is as well an elaborate system of law, exercised through a fully developed legal language. Splinches when Apparating require a "fair bit of paperwork" by the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad (4:6, 67). Arrangements for the World Quidditch Cup present a "massive organizational problem" (4:6, 69). Portkeys must be authorized

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and coordinated, and, as we learn later, all forms of transportation – the Floo network and even Apparition – can be monitored by the Ministry. There is a ban on experimental breeding, opening Hagrid to accusation (5:7, 129). Flying carpets are embargoed (even though Crouch thinks there is "a niche in the market for a family vehicle" (4:7, 91,)). There is a variety of Controlled Substances of various classes, such as the Erumpent Horn that Hermione recognizes in Xenophilius Lovegood's house. Foundational is the International Confederation of Warlocks' Statute of Secrecy of 1689, guarding the basic division between magic and Muggle worlds.

<sup>12</sup> Estimates regarding how many mainly women but also men were put to death in the witch hunts, ranging up to as many as a million persons.

Histories of witchcraft that focus on their gender as women include: Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, (NY: Norton, 1987); Joseph Klarts, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); *Witchcraft: Confessions and Accusation* ed. Mary Douglas, (London: Tavistock, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> The relation between magic and technology has been discussed by a number of commentators. See for example Roger Highfield *The Science of Harry Potter*, (NY: Penguin 2002); Margaret Oakes, "Flying Cars, Floo Powder, and Flaming Torches: The Hi-Tech, Low-Tech World of Wizardry," *Reading Harry Potter* 117-130, who reviews past comparisons between magic and science such as C.S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*, p.118. Also Alan Jacobs, "Harry Potters Magic" in *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, Jan. 2000, 35-38; Elizabeth Teare "Harry Potter and the Technology of Magic," *The Ivory Tower* 329-342; Benjamin Bruxvoort

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Lipscomb and W. Christopher Stewart, "Magic Science and the Ethics of Technology," Harry Potter and Philosophy, eds. David Baggett and Shawn E Klein, (Chicago: Open Court, 2004/2005) which particularly emphasizes the problem of limiting and controlling magic as a lesson about technology, p. 77, 90. They and others refer to Lynn Thorndike's 8 volume History of Magic and Experimental Science as "the real world analogue to History of Magic," p. 82. Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara's From Homer to Harry Potter (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006), argue that magic, like technology, can be used either for good or for evil, p. 234. Also Peter Appelbaum, "Harry Potter's World: Magic, Technoculture, and Becoming Human," in Harry Potter's World ed. Elizabeth Heilman, (NY: RoutledgeFarmer, 2003), 25-52.

<sup>14</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien emphasizes the need for an "inner consistency of reality" in order for fantasy to command the "Secondary belief" that makes its separate world plausible, Tree and Leaf, London : G. Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 80). Yet, as Rowling has said, she is doing something rather different from Tolkien; and Harry Potter is not fully an internally consistent world. Cf. Fred Inglis in Scholarly Studies in Harry Potter: Applying Academic Methods to a Popular Text ed. Cynthia Whitney Hallett and Edwin Mellen, Press Studies in British Literature Vol 99 2005, who invokes J.R.R. Tolkien's Secondary World, claiming that Harry Potter does not really have the internal coherence of a magical world, making it "more a subset of the actual world than one that is secondary or alternative." Rowling, he argues, prevents fantasy from overtaking the realist elements, while keeping the magic world closely allied to real one and more and more like it, the borders between them in flux. p. 191-192. Magic in the Harry Potter books is in fact not completely defined and

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consistent in its rules and applications. What things can be conjured, what needs to be bought? Why can't the Ministry tell who is doing underage magic if they have a Trace on underage wizards? When Voldemort's mother dies, Harry asks: "she could have got food and everything for herself by magic" (6:13, 262). Yet the food at Hogwarts, it turns out, doesn't just appear out of nowhere, but must be prepared by elves and levitated from the kitchen below into the dining hall. Hermione, who has been given the (as she complains gendered) task of cooking when the friends are in hiding in Book 7, explains that food is the first of the five Principal Exceptions to Gamp's Law of Elemental Transfiguration (7:15, 292): "It's impossible to make good food out of nothing! You can Summon it if you know where it is, you can transform it, you can increase the quantity if you've already got some." And what about clothes, which the Weasleys are hard pressed to buy? (And why can't the wizards figure out how the Muggles dress?). And what are the limits of the Extension Charms that increase the space in the tents at the World Quidditch Cup and in Slughorn's office? In an interview Rowling does clarify her rules about the moving figures in portraits: they can only visit other portraits in the same building, or other portraits of themselves. And she is very clear about one limit, as we will discuss in the next chapters, that magic cannot have power over death: "One of the most important things I decided was that magic cannot bring dead people back to life."

<sup>15</sup> I am puzzled by the claim of the [Field Guide](#) that the Dursleys gradually become "more aware of magic and bridge the Muggle and magical worlds," p, 53.

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<sup>16</sup> Lockhart's name also recalls "The Warlock's Hairy Heart" in Tales of Beedle the Bard, where he "locks away his own heart," p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Veronica Schanoes: "Cruel Heroes and Treacherous Texts: Educating the Reader in Moral Complexity and Critical Reading in J.K.Rowling's Harry Potter Books" Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays, ed Giselle Liza Anatol (Westport, Ct; Praeger 2003) 131-146 who discusses the ambivalent characterization of writing and reading in the series. Here is another trace of Spenser in Harry Potter. Spenser makes central the whole topic of the power of words, for both good and evil, revelation and deception, and figured as magic. Cf. Book II. Canto II: 15: "For pleasing words are like to Magick art, / That doth the charmed Snake in slumber lie." Spenser's epic is very much an interpretive quest, with Britomart, for example, in this same Book II Canto II, having glimpsed the image of her true love in Merlin's Mirror given to King Ryence – surely a source for the Mirror of Erised – goes on to ask: "Tell me some markes, by which he may appeare / If chaunce I him encounter." Verse 16: " For thy it round and hollow shaped was, Like to the world it selfe, and seem'd a world of glass." Also Verse 19. Note too: Merlin's name is feared, III.III.12: "that to this day for terror of his fame, the feinds do quake when any him to them does name." Canto III: I: 12 also contains the image of the "golden chaine of concord" that may be a background for Luna's golden letters.