



The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon

Lana A. Whited (Editor)

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Now available in paper, *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter* is the first book-length analysis of J. K. Rowling's work from a broad range of perspectives within literature, folklore, psychology, sociology, and popular culture. A significant portion of the book explores the Harry Potter series' literary ancestors, including magic and fantasy works by Ursula K. LeGuin, Monica Furlong, Jill Murphy, and others, as well as previous works about the British boarding school experience. Other chapters explore the moral and ethical dimensions of Harry's world, including objections to the series raised within some religious circles. In her new epilogue, Lana A. Whited brings this volume up to date by covering Rowling's latest book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon Details

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Emily says

Shouldn't Hermione be in Ravenclaw rather than Gryffindor?

Can American children understand a book that uses "foreign" language like Mum instead of Mom or trolley instead of cart?

Was it right for the New York Times to alter their Bestseller List parameters in order to cease HP's domination of the fiction list?

The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon, edited by Lana A. Whited is pithy stuff and explores these types of questions. I love examining/analyzing/beating to death anything I read or watch. The scholars collected in Whited's book show that HP merits their attention.

The article having the greatest number of quotes I want to memorize is "Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Construction of Authority" by Farah Mendelsohn. Here is a juicy tidbit, condensed from page 171: "Hufflepuff: a house dedicated to the sidekick and creating the mentality of the faithful follower. ...it is perfectly acceptable to kill off Cedric Diggory...in order to provide our hero with a motive to hold out and allow Dumbledore to deliver his 'consolatory' speech. ...For those readers who know their Star Trek, members of the Hufflepuff house wear the red shirt." Amen to that.

"Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender" by Eliza T. Dresang points out that Rowling imposes stereotypical hysterical/fearful/whining behavior [on Hermione:] and uses words like shriek, squeak, wail, squeal, and whimper, verbs never applied to male characters in the book. These descriptions are at odds with Hermione's basic role of "intellectual, problem solver" and seem to arise from stereotypes associated with her female gender rather than her own characterization.

Another great discussion assesses the translation of Harry and Co.'s British English into American, for the Scholastic editions. Verdict: Unnecessary. Thankfully, the amount of translating reduced dramatically with Goblet of Fire (You Say "Jelly," I Say "Jell-O"? Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language" by Philip Nel).

More food for thought was consumerism and conspicuous consumption; it is not limited to the Dursleys, says Elizabeth Teare in "Harry Potter and the Technology of Magic."

"Specters of Thatcherism" by Karin E. Westman examines power structures: pure-bloods vs. Muggleborns, house-elf controversy, prejudices against giants and werewolves, and what the persecution of Muggles at the Quidditch World Cup reveals about widespread wizardly attitudes.

Since these essays were published after Book 4 was published but prior to Book 5's release, I am on the lookout for other volumes which will take scholarly HP studies further.

Kathleen says

Did not read through the entire book, skimmed it to see how "accurate" essays seemed. Too much conjecture on a half-finished series for my liking; they should have printed a new one that discusses issues through Deathly Hallows (I can't find one if they had, so please enlighten me if anyone knows of one)

Aljoša says

I'm done. (after 13 months)

Amy says

Some of the essays suffer for being written mid-series; this collection was published between Goblet of Fire and Order of the Phoenix. There are some really interesting analyses of the books; favorites include Whited with Grimes analysis of the major characters through Kohlberg's theories of moral development; Nel's essay on the UK to US translation (it's more than just jumper to sweater); and Jentsch's review of the Spanish, German, and French translations of Harry Potter.

My favorite is Eliza Dresang's essay about Hermione and gender. I want to read more post modern feminist analysis and more gender analysis of the Harry Potter books. I've also got to read about the Mitfords, especially Jessica Mitford, since Dresang quotes an article that Hermione is modelled after Jessica Mitford, especially her civil rights activism. Jo Rowling is a Mitford fan.

Adam Ross says

Like the other collections of lit crit essays, this one is a mixed bag of insight surrounded by a mire of silliness.

Emily Cait says

Some great essays on the Harry Potter series! It's nice to have a wide variety of topics collected together.

joyce says

I really enjoyed this- it has interesting points of view and also includes quotes from JK Rowling herself. A must read for Harry Potter fans who want to know more about Rowling's intentions.

Rachel says

A couple of the essays here (on the differences between UK and US versions and on translations into other languages) were really interesting; a lot of the rest were just dull academic waffle I'm afraid. American academic waffle at that.

April Helms says

As a rabid Harry Potter fanatic, I thought a book delving into the literary significance could be an interesting read, and it was. Only one essay made me roll my eyes and wonder if the writer had actually read the books. All the essays -- even the "bad" one -- made me think. I really liked the essays on the difficulties in translation and comparing the characters and how they fared on the various levels of the thinking process. Also loved the article on Hermione, feminist thinking and the background history on Hermione's name. There was a smattering of annoying fact errors, which were annoying and should have been caught (the worst was an essay that stated that Hermione had a wizard parent and a Muggle parent -!?!?!?!), but they didn't detract from the other points of the essays.

Joan says

This was so nostalgic for me to read; it was like going back in time to the golden age of Harry Potter, when fan-made websites still ruled the internet instead of social media, and before Warner Bros had completely hijacked the series. It was also super interesting to see how the focus of this essay collection varied so differently from the essay collection I recently read that was published over 10 years later (mainly, no one in this book seemed concerned with the muggle-born vs pureblood struggle, which reflects how the earlier books didn't focus on that quite as much. The later essays almost didn't discuss anything else). My favorite essays from this collection were probably "The Education of a Wizard," "Crowning the King," "What Would Harry Do?," "Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language," "Harry Potter and the Tower of Babel," and "Apprentice Wizards Welcome." Overall though, I found all of these fascinating. I kind of wish I had my own copy of this instead of borrowing it from the library, so that I could go back over these more!

Angela says

I did not read this book in full, but read through the essays that seemed most interesting. I am a HP fanatic and I enjoyed the critique and literary comparisons. As a few other reviewers mentioned, some of the essays are hindered by the series being incomplete at the time this book was compiled.

Melissa says

I think there should be a 3rd edition now that all the books have been published.

Heather Andrews says

I liked this one, but I feel like many of the essays were overreaching and the layout was not my favorite. Better organization would have improved the rating of this piece significantly.
